CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION: A MODEL FOR YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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The context is the New Goshen United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. The problem is that there is no developed ministry to train leaders about youth discipleship. If leaders participate in discipleship training, then they will acquire the knowledge and tools necessary to create and lead a discipleship ministry targeting youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen. Through six weeks of discipleship training sessions combined with pre-project and post-project surveys, group discussions, and individual checkpoint reflections, the leaders will be equipped to create and lead a youth discipleship ministry at New Goshen United Methodist Church.

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As I think deeply and widely about this journey, one that has been peppered with mountaintop and valley experiences, I celebrate its completion. I celebrate with humility and indebted gratitude because of the influence and impact of the multitude of individuals who have helped me cross the finish line.

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daughter of the church for my entire life, from the bottom of my heart, I say to you both, thank you!!

DEDICATION

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! This labor of love could not have manifested without the presence and power of God at work. Therefore, I count it not robbery to wholly honor God for giving me clarity of mind, a consecrated heart, and committed hands to accomplish the divine work He has beckoned me to.

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journey. Mama, you taught me how to pray, dream, work hard, and bend but not break. Thank you for your unconditional love. I pray I have made you proud and honored to call me daughter.

INTRODUCTION

Sunday morning is the high time of worship at New Goshen UMC. There is a convergence of members in the sanctuary of this fifty-four-year-old edifice to sing, praise, worship, dance, shout, and hear the preached Word every Sunday morning. Although the worship service is spirit-filled, it is tailored for older adults. There is an obvious visual void of youth presence at New Goshen UMC. The urgency of this reality cannot be overstated or overlooked. Thus, a key area of addressing the void of Generation Z is youth discipleship. This project is designed to provide leaders with the necessary knowledge and tools to engage, equip, and empower youth between thirteen and eighteen years old to grow in their faith.

After carefully expounding on the intersecting points between my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis in the first chapter, my chief aim in chapter two was to provide the primary biblical underpinning for understanding the importance of providing moral and spiritual teaching and instruction to youths. This biblical underpinning will rest on the Old Testament wisdom book of Proverbs. Demonstrating individual or collective reticence in teaching and instructing youth in the ways of God is contrary to the command to teach and instruct the next generation given to us through the wisdom of Solomon. This argument is presented in chapter two through the exegesis of Proverbs 22:6, where Solomon conveyed the warning to Israel and the community to

teach and instruct the next generation in the ways of God to promote moral fitness and stability in the community.

Moreover, scripture reveals that the necessity for moral and spiritual teaching and instruction did not begin with Solomon. The biblical text discloses that moral and spiritual teaching and instruction originated with God—The Ultimate Teacher. In other words, to dismiss moral teaching and instruction is to dismiss God's sovereign will to use whatever God deems necessary to teach and instruct the next generation how to become more like God.

Following the biblical examination of Proverbs 22:6, chapter three provides a historical foundation for the necessity of teaching and instructing youth in being morally fit throughout history. As the Industrial Revolution began to rise, young men left their countryside homes and faith practices to relocate to the large cities to work in various industries. These young men were exposed to elements of crime, violence, and a host of sinful activities. This led to the founding of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), one of the primary organizations that embraced the necessity of teaching and instructing youth to be morally fit for the purpose of following Jesus Christ. Even amid a time of segregation in the country, the teaching and instruction provided by the YMCA on the national level ensured that young African American youths were nurtured in their faith, such as Rev. Howard Thurman, Rev. Dr. Benjamin Mays, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Chapter four offers a theological theme of the Church (ecclesiology) by examining discipleship as theology. The purpose of teaching the doctrine of the Christian faith is to make disciples aware of the core Christian knowledge they must possess to be

effective citizens of the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9 of the theological significance in the teaching and instructing of disciples. According to Kevin J. Vanhoozer, disciples must learn if they are to become "fit for the purpose of the city; fit for good gospel citizenship; fit to embody the values and proclaim the excellencies of the holy nation to which they belong."[1] Without rooting youth discipleship in an ecclesiological theology as being a servant, which aids the Church in making disciples for the purpose of following Jesus, the work of discipleship loses its efficacy.

Chapter five focuses on the importance of social constructivism and digital technology. Constructivism is rooted in the idea that the learner constructs knowledge. Its chief aim is to communicate information to support each other's learning. Gen Z is the first generation born into a world of digital technology. Gen Z has a worldview of a strong body ethic and love ethic. More and more people are making social connections on social media and digital platforms than ever, and this trend will not reverse. If the church is to pass the gospel to the next generation, it is imperative that she enters the digital natives' world to offer Jesus Christ. Therefore, chapter six comprises an overview of the research project.

The problem is New Goshen UMC is challenged by the leadership's lack of knowledge and tools necessary to disciple youth between thirteen and eighteen years old. The hypothesis of the project is if the leadership participates in a six-week focus group discipleship training for youth, then it will acquire both the knowledge and tools

[1] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

necessary to create a discipleship ministry targeting youth between thirteen and eighteen years old. The expected result is that the leaders participating in the focus group training will be equipped to train the laity within New Goshen UMC to disciple youth between thirteen and eighteen years old. The choice not to implement a youth discipleship ministry is not a choice if New Goshen UMC's long-term aim and aspiration is to advance forward as a community of faith.

Lastly, there was a six-week focus group training with leadership at New Goshen UMC. A pre-survey was conducted to measure each participant's preliminary understanding of Generation Z's worldview, discipleship, digital technology, and essential ideas related to the research project. Session one was an overview of the research project, youth discipleship, and its significance for the church. Session two provided a biblical standard for training youth in the ways and laws of God, primarily through the lens of Solomon, among other biblical characters and narratives. Session three focuses on the history of the YMCA's commitment to disciplining youth. The YMCA set a historical precedence for the development of the spiritual and moral essence of young men. Session four stressed the theological weightiness of teaching Christian doctrine as discipleship. Through the discipleship process, one is expected to develop the character and nature of Christ gradually. Session five offers social constructivism and digital technology as learning models best suited for discipleship with Generation Z. Being digital natives and strong proponents of collaboration, learning with and from each other, particularly using social media and digital platforms, is critical to engaging youth with new information. Session six concluded with a review of the six-week focus group experience and a discussion on the next steps for the church related to youth discipleship.

A post-survey was conducted to gauge the level of awareness, increased knowledge, and readiness to engage in youth discipleship for each focus group participant.

In conclusion, the expected effect of the six-week Focus Group Sessions was to collect information reflecting the leadership's hopes, desires, and plans regarding the church's future direction as it relates to youth discipleship ministry targeting youth between thirteen and eighteen. I conveyed to the focus group participants that I was not seeking perfection and proficiency in implementing a youth discipleship ministry but a heightened passion and an openness to enter the world of Generation Z in a genuine and transparent manner to begin building trustworthy relationships with youth. The aim was to precipitate a new level of excitement around youth discipleship. Consequently, at the conclusion of the six-week Focus Group Sessions, a unanimous group of six had greater sensibility, excitement, hope, and confidence in leading a ministry centered around youth discipleship. This is indispensable and requisite because the days of our youth being seen and not heard are no longer. A paradigm shift has occurred. Our youth are more zealous about living out the Great Commission than ever. Welcome them back to the church with open hearts, minds, and doors.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce a new model of discipleship training to the leadership at New Goshen United Methodist Church (UMC). The context of New Goshen UMC is an aging, declining, one hundred twenty-eight-year-old African American congregation led by an African American male senior pastor located in a predominately African American community in Greensboro, NC. When New Goshen UMC was founded, its original name was Goshen, named after the land in Egypt, found in the Book of Genesis. The structure endured two fires; however, after each fire, the dedicated members rebuilt a sanctuary for worship. The current sanctuary was built in 1970, and it was named New Goshen. Most of the community and church members referred to the newly built edifice as the New Goshen and thus became the chartered name. Located behind the church is the historical baseball field where the Goshen Red Wings played professional baseball in the Negro League. New Goshen has a church cemetery in which burials are dated back to 1896. In addition to having a historical baseball field in the rear of the church, another historical landmark is part of the New Goshen church history. This historical landmark is a Rosenwald school funded by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. This school was instrumental in educating African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s. The Rosenwald school is now closed and serves as the church's fellowship hall.

This community was once the home of most of the members of New Goshen UMC. Over the years, the Randleman Road area, where New Goshen UMC is located, has grown exponentially with single-family residences, multi-family residences, retail, restaurants, shopping, fitness centers, schools, public libraries, government, and public facilities, which has added to the attraction of families moving into the community. With this growth, the youth population has also experienced exponential growth. In addition to the increase in African American residents, since the early 1990s, the community has seen an increase in other ethnicities moving into the community. The new arrival of ethnic groups is predominately represented by the Latino and Asian American communities. These ethnic groups have successfully assimilated into the African American sub-culture of South Greensboro. New Goshen UMC made intermittent attempts to be relevant to this young and diverse community by having events such as the trunk or treat, movie night, serving hot dogs and pizza, and inflatables for the community, but has failed to relate and respond to the complex needs and concerns of this community, particularly the youth. Thus, this body of work will propose that when the leadership of New Goshen UMC increases the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively disciple youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen, New Goshen UMC will be equipped to offer a youth discipleship ministry that focuses on youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old.

My siblings and I lived in the home with my great-grandparents; however, my mother was very active in our lives. It was in 1972, at the age of five years old, that I had the wherewithal to conceptualize segregation and Jim Crow in the South. I was five years old when my mother and I were walking downtown on the sidewalk en route to a doctor's

appointment with the town's local doctor. As my mother held my hand as we walked and sang nursery rhymes, I could see people going in and coming out of the doctor's office. When my mother and I reached the point of entrance, my mother did not enter the doctor's office as I had seen many others doing as we were walking along the sidewalk. My mother continued past the front entrance of the doctor's office, walked around to the back of the doctor's office, and entered the back door. I asked my mother why we did not enter through the door that all the other people had entered and exited. My mother shared that the front door was only for white people, and black people had to use the back door if they wanted to see the doctor. I demanded to know why. My mother responded again, "That is just the way things are." I remembered being very upset by her response and mumbled under my breath as she took my hand again; this is not right. I am going to do something about this. That day has stayed with me my entire life. From that day onward, I became keenly aware of social and moral injustices all around me. It was as if God was walking alongside me and nudging me to take notice of social injustices, where other children my age did not seem to notice or care.

As a child, my immediate family and extended family were close-knit. I remember on Sunday afternoon following morning worship service it was always common for older cousins or aunts and uncles to visit my great-parent's home for Sunday dinner. Sunday after church was a special time in our home growing up as a child. My grandmother and great-grandmother would prepare enough food for what appeared would feed an army. The entire family would gather for Sunday dinner. We would never eat without offering God thanks for the food and the fellowship of family. I enjoyed the dinner conversations from week to week. I would listen to the adults discuss politics,

economics, local news, any issue that impacted Black life, and gossip. Throughout the early years of my childhood, it was common for my great-grandmother to sit on the front porch of our home on summer evenings after dinner for hours, talking with other women in the neighborhood. I imagine it was a way to socialize and a way to escape the sweltering summer heat and humidity of the Carolinas. As my great-grandmother sat on the front porch talking, my siblings and I would play games like hide-n-seek, red light-green light, hopscotch, red rover, and dodgeball. My great-grandmother forbade us to leave the yard, and she always kept an eye on us while she was sitting on the porch.

Nearing the end of my seventh-grade school year, my childhood changed drastically. My great-grandmother, who was the matriarch of our family, became ill and died. It was April of 1980, and my great-grandmother became ill. She spent several days in the hospital and had surgery to remove a blockage in her small intestine. Initially, I was not allowed to visit her in the hospital because she was in an intensive care unit where children were not allowed to visit. I remember being extremely sad because I had never experienced my great-grandmother being sick, and in addition, we had to celebrate my great-grandmother's birthday in the hospital. I also remember being very frightened because I could overhear family members saying that things were not looking good for my great-grandmother. I did not know what that fully meant as a seventh grader, but I knew it was not good. At this point in my childhood, I only knew of death as depicted on television. Death, for me, was a phenomenon that soared into the unknown, and it was scary. I sat in a corner chair by myself in the hospital lobby and prayed that God would not let my great-grandmother die. Two days after celebrating her birthday, my great-grandmother died at the local hospital.

The funeral service for my great-grandmother was at Shady Grove United Methodist Church, our home church. At thirteen years old, this was the first time I had ever witnessed a white person in the sanctuary. I was emotionally pulled in several different directions. I was angry because the white people who were present were from the same white family, which my great-grandmother labored as their domestic help. This angered me because I felt if this white family sincerely cared about my great-grandmother, they would not have subjected her to subordination, dehumanization, and the stripping of her personhood by hiring her to perform daily domestic duties, which were deemed to be beneath white women. I felt their treatment of her was to send an uninterrupted signal to society that my great-grandmother's status was subordinate and her worth was worthless simply because the pigmentation of her skin mirrored a ripened blackberry. Thus being preponderant proof of the presupposition that never could her soul bear the indelible mark of the image of God. I stood in the strange tension between anger and sorrow as I experienced my great-grandmother's death. I was angered because these white folk had interrupted my grieving process with their presence. At the same time, my heart was broken into a million pieces as I knew I would never see my great-grandmother again.

The event of my great-grandmother's funeral was profound for me because it was the second time as a child that I had sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit nudging me concerning racial and social justice issues. As a child, I was not able to discern these experiences as being the providential hand of God nudging me. Whether good, bad, or indifferent, all I knew was social justice and equality mattered to me. As I reflect on the event of losing my great-grandmother, painful and joyful emotions are evoked. I can see

where God, the Great Creator, was neither distant nor aloof; rather, God was concerned and agonized in my pain and was with me and comforted me through the presence of the Holy Spirit. I recognized the prevenient grace of the Triune God meeting me and wooing me early in my childhood.

Keeping in stride with the trends of modern culture is not what people are looking for from the church. New Goshen UMC must differentiate itself from the views of the proponents of trendy pop church culture and restrain itself from the proclivity of being a cookie-cutter replica of other ministries. Communities are looking for the church to develop incarnational ministries and programs that address the needs and concerns that plague the community. This will require New Goshen UMC to develop and sustain a relationship with the community to understand the cultural context and social location of the community. If so, aging and declining congregations located within young, diverse communities such as New Goshen UMC will not have to attend their own funeral but, through the implementation of a youth discipleship ministry, can joyfully look forward to a rebirth and revitalization of the church.

This new leadership model of a discipleship training workshop for the leadership at New Goshen UMC is being created to address the problem that the leadership of New Goshen UMC lacks the knowledge and tools to effectively disciple youth between thirteen to eighteen years old. New Goshen UMC is disconnected from the community due to differences in language, culture, age, and social location. These variables are barriers to this community experiencing the incarnational Jesus and coming to the true knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. In the absence of holistic salvation is the presence of marginalization, oppression, dehumanization, degradation, and fragmentation of a

community of people. By the merciful grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gift of salvation or liberation came that all persons might be free from the penalty and power of sin, and because of being recipients of grace, we are free to extend that same grace, compassion, and love of God in the world around us. This new model for discipleship training is rooted and grounded in the theological context of discipleship as theology and in the biblical context of Proverbs 22:6.

My ministry interest and skills are shaped by growing up poor during Jim Crow in the seventies in rural southeastern North Carolina. I experienced the pain and plague of racial and gender discrimination. Our African American community experienced taxation without adequate representation. Predominately white United Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches in my small hometown in Robeson County, North Carolina, were preoccupied with catering to their white congregants who were either complicit, complacent, or lacked empathy, compassion, and love for a struggling African American community living in the margins. This began to shape my passions and desires early in life to help Christians overcome all obstacles in their natural life, which places them in opposition to the person, mission, and message of Jesus Christ. I questioned whether white people could authentically be Christian if they had not crucified their flesh to their own will, passion, and desire. Matthew's gospel is clear, "if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matt. 16:24). This means sacrificing one's natural self to develop one's spiritual self through God's sanctifying grace. This denying or sacrificing certainly includes prejudice, elitism, tradition, and maintaining the status quo.

Although I grew up during the era of Jim Crow, affected by poverty and racism, these realities certainly left an indelible imprint on my life. What has had the greatest

influence and has shaped my ministry interest the most is being a child of the church and, ultimately, as a young adult walking away from the church, convinced that the church was not relevant in my life. I grew up my entire childhood and adolescent years in the church but did not have my identity in Christ. I remember participating in youth ministry, which included many youths my age. I enjoyed youth ministry because it was, for me, a time of social gathering. It was a time when my neighborhood friends and family members could extend the youthful conversations and activities that I enjoyed. The Youth Ministry Director and youth ministry volunteers, which were comprised of single young adult members of the church, met with us on a regular basis. These youth gatherings were purely social in nature, following an opening devotion or prayer. Youth discipleship did not take place.

As a member of the youth group, I cannot remember ever discussing Christian theology or church doctrine. The youth director and her assistants took for granted that our participation in the youth group equated to us knowing God and having a relationship with God. No one ever taught us about the Triune God, creation, human nature, sin, etc. No one ever thought to see how we, as youth, experienced God in our young world or what we thought about the world. I remained active in our youth ministry throughout high school.

Truthfully, I knew early in my teen years that once I was away from my mother's house and her strict rules, attending church and being active in the life of the church would come to an end. I thought I was smart enough and knew way more than those ladies leading youth ministry that my time would be better spent doing the things I had dreamed of when I became an adult. After graduating high school, I moved to Raleigh,

North Carolina, to attend college but was not interested in receiving watch-care covering from another church while I was away from home.

My great-grandmother, being deceased, who was my spiritual rock, created a void from the absence of Christian discipleship that she provided me as a child. It is the lack of Christian discipleship between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old that I began to become discipled by society and not the church. The most interesting aspect of those years, as I reflect, is the church did not notice that it had failed to disciple me and that something else had filled the void the church had left.

My ministry interest, gifts, and skills in leading youth and young adult small group discipleship ministries, paired with New Goshen UMC's lack of knowledge and tools required to effectively disciple youth between thirteen to eighteen years old, comes together in a logical and consistent form where ministry interest and desire intersects with the needs of the current context. It is at this intersection of my ministry interest in youth discipleship, stemming from my own lack of discipleship as a youth from my local church with the desperate need to increase the knowledge and tools of the leadership at New Goshen UMC to equip the leadership of this context to create a youth discipleship ministry, targeting youth thirteen to eighteen years old is the point of convergence which forms the basis for this Doctor of Ministry project.

This youth discipleship training project draws from Proverbs 22:6, highlighting Solomon's wisdom provided in a biblical insight into child rearing, which produces adults with a Christlike nature and stable community life. In this scripture, Solomon is warning parents and the Church of the negative consequences of not teaching and instructing youth in the ways of God. Second, this text points the Church and the

community to a responsibility commanded by God. Becoming a disciple of Christ includes professing Jesus Christ as Lord, which is the Christian path to receiving salvation. It is critical for the youth to understand that discipleship is the entryway to living as a citizen for eternity in the Kingdom of God. This scripture signals to the Church its imminent call to teach and instruct the youth in scripture and doctrine. Thirdly, showcasing God's love for all humanity, including the youth who was thought to have little value.

The text sets the stage for implementing this discipleship training project, which involves the church being present, visible, and relatable with the youth at New Goshen UMC to build trust, develop relationships, create a sense of shared community, and offer Jesus Christ the free pardon of sin through sharing and living the Gospel through the creation of a discipleship ministry targeting youth between thirteen and eighteen years old.

The aim of the project is to create organic opportunities inside and outside of the church to connect and fellowship with the youth and their parents who seek a deeper relationship and understanding of God and God's purpose for their lives. It is imperative in this culture to connect with those through God's Word, who Walter Brueggeman categorizes into three groups: 1). Outsiders Becoming Insiders, 2) Forgetters Made Rememberers, and 3). Beloved Children Become Belief-ful Adults.[1] These groups that Brueggeman speaks of represent "candidates for membership in Israel's covenant" or candidates for discipleship.[2]

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 2011), 48, 71, 94.

[2] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination,* 48.

The first group is those who are separated and stand apart from the community of faith, live by a worldly or alternative narrative, and do not have membership in a church. The second group is those primarily inside the household of faith who have slipped into weariness and bitterness and have grown cold and cantankerous. This group is not the most conspicuous since it is not as noticeable when those inside the church also need discipleship. The third group which this Doctor of Ministry project will focus its attention on are children of believers who may or may not grow into "consenting adults" even after being baptized as a child/youth and part of the church life in their formative years.[3] I will also add the youth who are unchurched and may have never been baptized, and this is their first experience with a community of faith.

This is by far the most difficult group to relate to because there is not a single text or event to relate to. It is an ongoing process en route to adulthood. The child, at their own pace, affirms and claims the "Good News" of the Christian faith through ongoing conversations, affirmation, and nurturing; however, it can be a long process as the child experiences the pangs of becoming an adult.[4] In this cultural context and space, these people coexist in the same community.

Through the youth discipleship training project, we seek to develop competent church leaders to teach and instruct youth in the community. We offer discipleship as a means of grace found in seeing the Lord high and lifted up, as Isaiah did in the year King Uzziah died. We also aim to create a youth discipleship ministry to transform the

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[3] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 48.

[4] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination,* 94-95.

community by advancing African American communities and other marginalized ethnic groups through the ideals embedded in a Social Gospel.

It is my opinion that this community is thirsty for change and looking to New Goshen UMC for leadership and spiritual guidance for its youth. Through discipleship plans shared in this work, my faith is wide enough to hold fast to the notion that God is able. This community will once again find individual and communal purpose through a renewed sensibility and commitment to youth discipleship as the work of God in being the hands and feet of Christ in God's beloved community as the "Kingdom of God" is revealed.

After working at a mental health facility for several years, in 1994, I returned to UNC-Pembroke to complete the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree in political science. Unbeknownst to me, upon returning to UNC-Pembroke, I would cross paths with Dr. John Jay, the Director of Continuing Education and Summer School. Dr. Jay was a nurturing, passionate, no-nonsense educator and administrator who had exceptionally high expectations of every student, especially African American students. Dr. John Jay challenged me intellectually, civically, and spiritually during and beyond my years at UNC-Pembroke. He would often remind me of the blessing and the burden of being the first in my family to attend and graduate college. He was a gatekeeper for academic excellence, instilling in me that I had the God-breathed intellectual capacity to excel.

UNC-Pembroke is a state-funded university, yet Dr. John Jay always shared his faith, which I believe was for my edification, encouragement, and emphasis on my human responsibility. He would always matter-of-factly conclude our mentoring sessions with Luke 12:48, "…from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be

required; and from the one to whom much is entrusted, even more will be demanded" (NRSV).[5] It was under Dr. Jay's mentorship, guidance, and fathering that I transitioned from pursuing a degree as a means to an end to submitting myself wholly to the praxis of learning so that I may impact others. Subconsciously, during my undergraduate years, I was still seeking a father to replace my biological father, who had been absent since childhood. To that end, I respected Dr. Jay's stern, fatherly nature and clung to his every word.

Earning my bachelor's degree was the catalyst that precipitated multiple doors of opportunity opening for me in the area of clinical supervision and leadership. This was long before the time when a Master of Counseling degree was required to provide clinical supervision. After working years in the mental health field, I decided to return to college to pursue a Master of Business Administration degree (MBA) to fulfill the educational requirements for senior management positions. I matriculated at North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina; however, I completed the final requirements for the MBA degree online at American InterContinental University in 2005. This advanced degree, coupled with years of mental health experience, catapulted me into senior management. As a result of furthering my education, I gained strengths in management, leadership, planning, and facilitation, which aided me in becoming a more effective and efficient leader. Considering learning to be a life-long endeavor, after much prayer, I applied and was accepted at Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina, to pursue a Master of Divinity degree.

[5] Biblical citations are from the New Living Translation, unless otherwise noted, Luke 12:48.

The Master of Divinity degree is required for ordination in the United Methodist Church. Earning the Master of Divinity degree made provision for full-time ministry in the United Methodist Church. Through achieving the Master of Divinity degree, I have earned through a board of examiners Provisional Elder status on track to be ordained as an Elder in full connection with the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. The pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree will, even more, provide the critical thinking, leadership, pastoral care, and homiletical skills required to lead and nurture congregations (both virtual and in-person) through developing, implementing, and evaluating preaching and leadership models for the post-modern twenty-first-century church.

Early in my adulthood, I became pregnant with my oldest daughter. Being a young, single mother was difficult since I only had a high school diploma and a part-time job. It was a difficult time emotionally and financially because I had to grow up quickly to face the responsibility of being a mother. Fortunately, I had the support of my mother and grandmother to help with raising my daughter. My mother and grandmother's support made it possible for me to return to college and continue my educational goals. Me and my daughter's father never had a relationship, and he was not involved in her life. While studying for a degree at UNC-Pembroke, I began dating a student in my cohort. We decided to live together, and shortly thereafter, I became pregnant with my second daughter. We lived together unmarried for six years. Our six-year relationship was plagued with infidelity and physical and verbal abuse. After the relationship ended, I returned to my mother's house with two children.

After living with my mother for a few months, I was able to get an apartment and move out of my mother's house. I continued working full-time to provide for my children but had not committed to returning to college to complete my bachelor's degree. This continued to be a challenging time financially. My mother and grandmother were encouraging me to return to college and complete my degree. I knew that completing my bachelor's degree would ease the weight of the financial burden that weighed me down. Being completely frustrated with my current life situation, I made the decision to return to UNC-Pembroke in the fall semester of 1994. In the summer of 1995, I completed the requirements to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science.

In the fall of the same year, I began dating Reggie, a soldier stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We dated for a year and decided to live together. Once again, I abandoned the values and morals instilled in me as a youth. My mother and grandmother were not happy with my decision to live with a man whom I was not married to and openly expressed their displeasure. Reggie's parents were not happy with our decision to live together but made a genuine effort to respect our decision. Nevertheless, we moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1996. Life was going well for a change. I held a management position in the mental health field and Reggie had been promoted to a Non-Commissioned Officer within the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States Army. Publicly, everything was great. I could not have been happier. The reality was privately I was experiencing internal turmoil and dissonance. I felt a void and a longing for a sense of wholeness and peace, which I knew could not be satisfied by living with Reggie. Yet, I made the decision to continue with the existing status of the relationship with Reggie, knowing that it could not satisfy my malnourished soul.

My longing and God's tugging continued to increase in intensity, which led to me following various television ministries. The Sunday morning following Thanksgiving Day of 1997, I returned to the United Methodist Church, where I was raised. My presence was probably surprising to the congregation who had become accustomed to seeing me only on Easter and Mother's Day. It was on that fourth Sunday in November of 1997 in the worship service that the emptiness in my soul was filled with peace and joy. During the altar call to Christian discipleship, I recommitted my life to Jesus Christ.

After recommitting my life to Christ, I continued to remain in the relationship with Reggie in the hope of leading him to Christ and marriage. In December of 1997, Reggie was given military orders to leave Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and report to Ft. Carson, Colorado. In January of 1998, finding out I was pregnant with my third daughter invoked the beginning of an extremely difficult time in my adult life. Not wanting the people in my private or public life to see my life in shambles, I experienced intermittent depression, which would often last for several weeks as I wrestled with self-pride. My image, reputation, and living up to the façade of having my life in order were more important than dealing with the unpleasantries and emotional weight of my current reality. Uprooting my children's life to relocate to Colorado with a man I was not married to was not an option. Thus, the idea of my and Reggie's relationship coming to an end caused a great amount of grief, anxiety, and depression. Being pregnant, ending an intimate relationship, and starring at being a thirty-year-old single mother of three children pushed me into a deep, dark depression for the first three months of the pregnancy.

Amid all that was taking place, it was at this stage of my adulthood when I experienced God as a comforter and sustainer. Being in such a low place changed my view of myself and magnified God's love as I had never experienced before. While out of work on maternity leave, I developed daily spiritual disciplines of reading scripture, praying, meditation, and journaling. What seemed like the worst time in my adult life became the best time in my adult life, spiritually. There was a reconnection with God which I had not experienced since the passing of my great-grandmother. It was during this period in my life that I came to the realization that I had displaced God with material things. I became passionate and felt called to share my faith, preach, and teach to the congregation at my church what it meant to be an evangelistic, disciple-making church that shares the love of Jesus Christ with others through serving and meeting the needs of others, especially the poor, marginalized, oppressed, and discriminated as Jesus describes in Matthew 25:34-40.

I am certain that who I am now is heavily influenced by the mountain top and valley experiences in my life. As I reflect on my life, it has been through the crucible of pain that who I am was formed. Deeply loving myself and others was birthed out of pain. As I began to see all people created in the image of God, I wanted to grow in the knowledge of God. The craving for knowledge led me on a path to seminary. It was during my adult years that my hope was restored in the institution of marriage. Finally arriving at a place where I could properly give and receive love, I began dating the man whom I would marry in 2004.

I am somberly reminded of life's rhythmical pattern, which vacillates between lofty mountaintop views and steep craggy clefts in the hollow of the valley by the death

of my second oldest daughter. Brittany's death shook my faith to the core. She was a healthy, well-rounded college student about to celebrate her nineteenth birthday in the summer of 2008 when she was killed in a car accident. After a brief bout of anger and depression, I invited God into my pain. God revealed God's self through the presence of others. Until this tragic event, I was a very private person who handled my own affairs. God graced me to trust others with my pain. God became my refuge, joy, and peace. Through the grieving and healing process, God began to stir compassion in my soul for parents who had experienced the loss of a child. Out of my pain and grief, a monthly support group for grieving parents was launched and still meets today. Grieving the death of my daughter impacted my ministry in the way I preach, teach, interpret scripture, and understand the call and conduct of the Universal Church, as Paul succinctly lays out in Ephesians.

Life resumed professionally as I continued in the mental health field as a manager. As my career progressed, I was promoted to senior management in the mental health field. Having the daily responsibilities of providing oversight to a team of clinicians, planning, developing, and managing a multi-million-dollar budget, managing federal and state contracts, procurement, and facilities, and generating monthly, quarterly, and annual reports on the fiscal and operational health of the organization. My responsibilities progressively increased in proportion to the position I managed. I entered mental health in an entry-level management position but was able to advance during my career to senior-level management. While I was experiencing growth in my career, I was simultaneously experiencing growth in serving in the church. I began by serving on the committee for young adult ministry. I eventually became the Director of Young Adult

Ministry and developed a Campus Ministry that coordinated and linked the church's college students with the ministry on their college campuses. I served on various boards of the church as I moved into leadership positions in the church. After many years of serving in ministry at my home church, I accepted the call to pastoral ministry.

The African American community which surrounds New Goshen UMC, and the membership are different in their socio-economic status, age, and worldview. New Goshen UMC prides itself on being an outreach and missional-minded church. There are numerous projects the church participates in to reach the poor, homeless, hungry, needy, and young adults in Greensboro and internationally through conference donations. New Goshen UMC has implemented a connection Sunday with North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University students called Aggie Sunday. This is observed on the fourth Sunday of every month when the students are recognized during the worship service and invited to share in a meal with New Goshen UMC. However, there are not any discipleship or missional ministries to teach youth or adults to help them develop and shape their identities in Christ. There are not any mission ministries that meet the needs of residents struggling to overcome poverty, poor English language skills, students underperforming, high percentage of high school drop-out rate, low percentage of homeownership, legal and immigration issues, lack of recreational and social activities for children and youth. Though challenged by these deficiencies, the community's strength lies in its dignity, pride, and sense of community. The residents of the community are seeking change but no longer look to the church to partner with the community to usher in this change. New Goshen UMC is passionate about youth discipleship and outreach to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the youth in the

community; however, they are reluctant to leave their comfort zone in crossing generational barriers to share the gospel.

I believe my ministerial skills developed in previously serving cross-racial congregations as an African American female pastor are critical in minimizing the cultural barriers that impede New Goshen UMC from engaging in youth discipleship and outreach in the surrounding community with increasing diversity. My organizational development, leading strategic cross-discipline teams, ability to drive outcomes, passion for pastoral care, prophetic preaching, teaching, adaptability, flexibility, and being relatable are all ministerial skills that converge with my context in this project at the point of being a thought leader and visionary who is gifted at connecting with youth and young adults from all walks of life within the community.

In my spiritual journey as being African American, poor, reared in a neighborhood where there was dilapidation, brokenness, facing racism, underfunded schools, public housing, teen pregnancy, lack of access to community resources, discriminatory employment practices, law enforcement which policed our neighborhood instead of protecting it were all part of my spiritual journey along with being raised by a loving Christian family, nurtured by a loving church family, developed by caring and compassionate school teachers all has shaped me and led me to a relationship and personal acceptance of Jesus Christ.

My spiritual journey helped me understand myself and my personality and how my personality was designed for my purpose of discipling the next generation and providing hope to the poor, marginalized, abused, and misused that God loves them and has not abandoned them amid their suffering and bondage. It is the convergence of my

spiritual journey and the contextual analysis that created the basis for this Doctor of Ministry project, which will be in youth discipleship training for leaders. Equipping leaders for effective youth discipleship in the twenty-first century is a ministerial interest due to discovering the love of God and witnessing a fresh expression of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, where marginalized people have experienced everything except good news, is a life-long passion and call of mine kindled throughout my life experiences. The youth in the community will come to experience the love of God by following Jesus Christ, and the congregation will begin to experience God in a new way as God reveals a different facet of God. I am excited and expecting God to open my heart and eyes to the power of God as I trust the process as the Holy Spirit leads.

It is my aim to initiate this youth discipleship project to equip New Goshen UMC leaders in increasing their knowledge and tools needed to disciple youth. The ability to facilitate a youth discipleship ministry will improve the youth's moral and spiritual well-being as they grow in Christlikeness. Through teaching and instructing youth on how to live a life following Christ, the goal is to create a stable community life and improve the moral and spiritual well-being of the youth in the New Goshen UMC community. The aim is to have an inclusive youth discipleship ministry at New Goshen UMC by being equipped to offer the community contextual discipleship, youth activities, and programming that reflects the church's love, faithfulness, and commitment to living out the expectations God has for the church through sharing the "Good News" with all people to make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the community.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Solomon states, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Pro. 22:6, NRSV). This verse of scripture clearly indicates that God has an expectation for leaders and parents to teach the youth of the community the commands of God to develop their relationship with God and promote right living. As a result, teaching and instruction are not strange phenomena in the biblical text. Neither is teaching and instruction a socially constructed reality housed in the halls of academia. Nevertheless, to the detriment of both the student and society, academic disciplines are often taught using a scholastic and secular pedagogy that does not incorporate a biblical framework. This model of isolated and compartmentalized teaching and instruction is counterproductive because it suppresses the necessity of critical thinking, thus creating a degree of dissonance between God, truth, and knowledge. In essence, there should be a synchronization of the truth revealed in scripture and the truth revealed in the natural order. For example, the seminary trained Mary McLeod Bethune had a passion for training and instructing youth. Thus, founding the Daytona Beach Literary and Industrial School, a boarding school to train and instruct young African American girls.[1] Therefore, when religious scholars, educators, and theologians engage in biblical integration, it is for

[1] National Women’s History Museum, “Mary McLeod Bethune,” Women’s History, https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mary-mcleod-bethune.

the sole purpose of identifying the common point of intersection between their academic disciplines and absolute truth and knowledge as presented in scripture. It is in *On True Religion* (*De vera religione)* that Augustine of Hippo identifies God as absolute truth and knowledge when he states:

> Every approach to a good and blessed life is to be found in the true religion, which is the worship of the one God, who is acknowledged by the sincerest piety to be the source of all kinds of being, from which the universe derives its origin, in which it finds its completion, by which it is held together.[2]

Hence, the tedious task of biblical integration is intended to be useful not only to a single entity but also to innumerable and varied groups, both present and future generations.

Scripture records narratives throughout the Old Testament where leaders provided training and instruction which impacted not only the present generation but future generations to come. The Old Testament is filled with illustrations of leaders whose teaching and instruction benefited innumerable generations beyond them. When analyzing the valued qualities associated with teaching and instructing the future generations through the lens of God, Moses and Joshua are critical if one is to reach an accurate interpretation of Proverbs 22:6. Exploring the aspects of teaching and instructing the next generation through the omniscient lens of God, the Father of Wisdom, offers a legitimate view of the necessity for training and instruction to future generations in the Old Testament church as well as the New Testament church. After receiving enlightenment through the Father of Wisdom, one can rationalize that those who are

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[2] David Voprada, "Question, God and Truth in Augustine's Confessions," Catholic Faculty of Theology, Charles University in Prague, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiT9b3hqc2FAxUmSTABHWjsDioQFnoECBcQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.academia.edu%2F24842610%2FQuestion_God_and_Truth_in_Augustines_Confessions&usg=AOvVaw2mG0G857vs71CoDNyWuOx8&opi=89978449.

committed to following the ways of God are also intentional in providing training and instruction on the commands and decrees of God to future generations.

In Genesis, God is the ultimate Teacher and Instructor of biblical principles for right living. God provides teaching and instruction to Adam regarding obedience and the consequences of disobedience. "And the LORD God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gn. 2:16-17, NIV). This qualitative teaching rendered by God is profound and practical. If Adam had taken heed to God's teaching and instruction, he would have preserved his life and, ultimately, the life of all humankind. God's teaching and instruction are meant to be life-giving not only for Adam but for future generations. Moreover, if New Goshen UMC is to faithfully live out the mission of The United Methodist Church, "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world"[3] that intentionality must be channeled through the purposeful and deliberate character and intent of God, that all generations know and obey the decrees and commands of God.

One finds God's continued teaching and instruction as one eavesdrops on King David's conversation with God following his indiscretion with Bathsheba. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (Ps. 32:8, NIV). God teaches David that there is a great blessing for the person who is not puffed up with pride but knows their sin is forgiven by God alone.

How can one overlook Moses as a great teacher and instructor in the Old Testament? Through the impartation he received via encountering God face-to-face, it is

[3] Brian K. Milford, *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 93.

not a wonder that Moses is filled with godly wisdom and knowledge. As a result, Moses' call to ministry and leadership stretches beyond delivering a generation of Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. God catapults Moses into the role of chief teacher and trainer of holy and righteous living to this generation of Israelites, which he recently delivered out of Egyptian slavery. However, the genius of Moses rests in his understanding that the next generation of Israel's youth, who will be born in the wilderness without any knowledge of God, will be cut off from God and perish lest the teaching and instruction he provides not only serve this present generation of Israelites but serve future generations as well. Thus, part and parcel of Moses' strategic leadership plan was instructing and teaching leaders how to teach and instruct Israel's future generations effectively.

Moses' chief aim was to continually make God known to all generations so that the application of godly principles and commands is the ordering guild of one's steps throughout one's life. This teaching and instruction Moses is tasked with is by no means an easy assignment; nevertheless, Moses exhorts not only the Israelites to follow his teaching and instruction, but they must also teach them to their children.

> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. In the future, when your son asks you, "what is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand…" (Deut. 6:6-9,20-21).

Moses encompasses Deuteronomy chapters four through six, teaching and instructing the Israelites on the significance and future impact of loving the Lord and keeping His commandments. These are the instructions and teachings which are designed to preserve

the nation of Israel. Moses' teachings and instructions would be the trajectory for blessing future generations.

With a continuum of Moses' teaching and instruction to future generations through his successor, Joshua, Israel's legacy is secured. After the death of Moses, his young assistant and successor continued teaching and instructing this young generation, who were born while traversing through the wilderness, the decrees and commands of God, which are recorded in the book that bears his name. Following the transition of Moses, Joshua now receives instruction and discipleship under the tutelage of the ultimate Teacher, God, according to Joshua 1:7-8. "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (Josh 1:7-8). In verses seven (d), eight (c), and nine (c), the ultimate Teacher now shifts the focus from teaching and instructing Joshua in keeping the way of the law and in developing spiritual disciplines to aid him in keeping the way of the law to teaching him how keeping the law is beneficial in every area of his life.

As one observes how God disciple Moses, it is very different from how God disciple Joshua. There is adaptability and flexibility needed if God's chosen people were to be successful in their conquest of the land God had promised to them. Joshua could not implement the same leadership style of teaching and instructing that Moses had employed. God, being aware that Israel's social location and context had shifted, Joshua's approach to teaching, instructing, and leading methods would need to shift. Joshua could not engage in teaching, instructing, and leading this next generation in the

same ways as Moses if he expected to enjoy success. As Joshua spent time in the presence of God, he was able to discern the voice of God, which resulted in him being flexible and adaptable in his approach to teaching and instructing God's chosen people. As the leaders of New Goshen teach and instruct the youth of this generation, it is imperative that they understand that they cannot employ the teaching and instruction methods of their predecessors. Like Joshua, if New Goshen UMC's leaders are to be successful in leading a discipleship ministry for youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen, being able to adapt to a generation that is immersed in technology and driven by social media and possess the flexibility to shift abruptly to adjust to the youth's short attention span will be required.

One finds God, the ultimate Teacher, demonstrating the need to be adaptable and flexible in teaching and instructing Joshua. God does not exhibit tunnel vision and remain on a single track. Having a general understanding of Gen Z's need to make information practical and beneficial for their use will provide the leadership at New Goshen UMC with the cues needed to be flexible and adaptable in meeting their youth's needs. Knowing how to remain flexible and adaptable when teaching and instructing youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen are attributes that can improve the leader's communication and relational skills. The scriptures are explicit in communicating that if one submits oneself to godly teaching and instruction, then one can expect to yield the harvest of a prosperous and successful life because of God's promise to be with them wherever they go.

As a result of Joshua's teaching and instruction and Israel's obedience to his teachings, Israel experienced great success and occupied the land of Canaan, which God

had promised to their ancestors. Through Joshua's continued and consistent teaching and instruction, Israel celebrated victory after victory in battle. They defeated the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and the citizens of Jericho. These varied battles won by Israel's army despite oftentimes being vastly outnumbered, less proficient in military warfare, and lacking in state-of-the-art military weaponry are all illustrations of Joshua and the nation of Israel experiencing a prosperous and successful life as a result of obeying the instructions of God.

Concluding a lifetime of teaching and instructing the Israelites, Joshua prepares to die. However, prior to his death, Joshua delivers his final teachings and instructions to this once youthful generation who now has aged. In chapter twenty-four, Joshua brings the twelve tribes of Israel and their leadership together at Shechem for general conferencing. One sees where "Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges, and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God" (Jos. 24:1). Joshua intentionally brings leaders and laity together, which implies that the responsibility for teaching and instructing Israel's emergent generation does not rest solely in the hands of one person or one group. Rather, teaching and instructing Israel's youth requires the unified efforts of both leadership and laity. However, it is the elders, leaders, judges, and officials who will model behavior and mentor the members of the tribes in teaching and instructing this next generation. It will serve New Goshen UMC well to understand that training and instructing their youth in the ways of God will require the commitment of both leadership and laity. This fundamental perspective must be at the nerve center of youth discipleship if there is to be a realistic expectation that youth will grow in the love and knowledge of God. The

necessity of many hands sharing in the responsibility of youth discipleship is akin to the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

At this general conference which Joshua gathers the collective nation of Israel, he begins the teaching session in verse two and concludes in verse thirteen with a survey of people, promise, and provision. In this Old Testament survey of Israel's history, Joshua's teaching highlights God's strength, sovereignty, and supremacy in the life of the nation of Israel, dating back to Terah, the father of Abraham. Because of God's spotless track record with Israel, which Joshua reminds the people is well documented without reproach or contradiction, he instructs Israel to make a choice as to whose ways they will follow.

> Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living (Jos. 24:14-15b).

This is a critical point in the life of Israel, just as it is a critical point in the life of believers today. Discipleship involves human agency. One must, of their own volition, choose to live according to the teachings and instructions found in the Word of God. Moreover, if discipleship is to produce its desired end of persons becoming more like God, then one must choose to participate in the discipleship process. It is in Joshua 24:15c where the resounding ring of Joshua's declarative statement can be heard. He makes it clear to all who are listening. He loudly belts that not only he but his entire household will follow the teachings and instructions of the Lord. "…But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Jos. 24:15c). Upon reflecting on the character of God, the hesed of God, God's love, which is demonstrated time and time again toward Israel is sufficient cause for him to obey the commands and decrees of God.

Israel is responsive to Joshua's teaching and instructions as the general conference and the life of Joshua concludes. Joshua and the people of Israel entered into an agreement at this final conference at Shechem. It is here that Joshua restates God's decrees and laws. Israel has received training and instruction to guide them in forging ahead. Israel follows the teachings and instructions of Joshua by serving the Lord all of Joshua's life and through the lifetime of the elders who assumed the responsibilities of teaching and instructing Israel following the death of Joshua.

Considering Israel's affirmative response to the final teachings and instructions of Joshua and the continued obedience to the teachings and instructions of the elders following the death of Joshua, one can logically deduce that Israel's future generations will continue to follow the teachings and instructions, which had proven to lead to a prosperous and successful life. On the contrary, as one season of life ended with the narrative of Israel's obedience to God being rewarded with conquests of enemies and territories in the Book of Joshua and another season of life began for Israel in the Book of Judges, one finds an abrupt and decisive break between God and Israel. Notwithstanding the teaching and instructing of the decrees and commands of God, Israel has chosen to disobey the laws and commands of God after the death of the generation of Joshua. What is clear in Judges chapter two is this young generation, which had arisen, did not know the Lord, and they did not know the great things that God had done for Israel. "After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel" (Jud. 2:10).

Throughout chapter one of the Book of Joshua, Joshua teaches and instructs this young generation on the importance of knowing and obeying the commands of God. In

chapter twenty-four Joshua recaps these teachings and instructions to a generation who now has aged that they now receive the mantle of teaching the next generation. This generation, following the death of Moses, prospered and was successful due to the teaching and instruction of Joshua. However, it is with a heavy heart that one opens the Book of Judges and discovers in chapter two the unimaginable. A fear which grips every subsequent generation in the Church—the fear that the next generation will not know the Lord.

For it is Solomon who reminds us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life" (Pro. 9:10-11, NIV). Neglecting to provide biblical teaching and instruction to the youth is contradictory to the nature and character of God and a blueprint for the making of a troubled-filled adult life. In the very beginning of the article, "What is the Cause of so Many Young People Falling Away From Faith?" the author highlights the fact that the number of young people walking away from their faith in Jesus Christ is staggering. Moreover, the author underscores this startling phenomenon of young people abandoning their faith in Jesus Christ at unprecedented rates by making the presupposition that the primary cause of young people abandoning their faith is directly correlated to their failure to receive biblical discipleship as a child.[4] Youth and moral instruction are not at odds with each other in either Scripture or Christendom. As a matter of fact, providing moral instruction for the spiritual growth of the youth is interwoven throughout the entirety of the biblical Canon

[4] Compelling Truth, "What Is the Cause of So Many Young People Falling Away From Faith," Compelling Truth, https://www.compellingtruth.org/falling-away.html.

and the doctrines of the Church. Since this is the case, why have New Goshen UMC and many other churches feebly watched the slow and steady church exodus of one generation of youth after another? Yet in an article published by Barna research in *Millennials and Generations* entitled, "Over Half of Gen Z Teens Feel Motivated to Learn More About Jesus," the data indicates that an overwhelming percentage of North American teens have a desire to learn more about Jesus as "emerging adults"[5] and throughout adulthood.[6]

There are numerous references highlighted throughout Old Testament scripture that illustrate community leaders and laity having the responsibility to instruct, train, and discipline its members, including the youth, in the way of wisdom to promote stable community life. The selected passage of exegetical scripture is Proverbs 22:6. In this passage, we have Solomon sounding the alarm, in like fashion, during his time of the necessity of parents and community leaders to provide continual moral instruction and training to the youth, lest they be left to their own foolishness and succumb to worldly dangers. Proverbs 22:6 is found in the First Solomonic Collection of Sayings and is classified as part of the Royal Collection Concluded of Proverbs 22:1-16. The focal theme of the entire Royal Collection, Proverbs 10:1-22:16, is wisdom.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the Christian church (certainly with exceptions) is no longer the community that culturally, historically, and theologically shapes the thinking and beliefs of individuals in North America. Individuals are no longer attending

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[5] The term emerging adult or emerging adulthood was coined in 2000 by Jeffrey J. Arnett, PhD from Clark University. Emerging adulthood is the period of development between the ages of 18-29 in westernized cultures.

[6] Barna Researchers, "Over Half of Gen Z Teens Feel Motivated to Learn More About Jesus," Barna, https://www.barna.com/research/teens-and-jesus/.

worship services, Sunday or church school, programs, and events in masses as they once did in the twentieth century. A focal area where this is most prevalent is with youth. Youth Sunday school classes are empty, and children's Easter programs have all been canceled. Youth mission projects have been replaced with adult mission projects. Moreover, more and more youth are participating in athletic events, virtual video gaming, surfing the internet, scrolling on social media platforms, texting, or video chatting with friends, just to mention a few, during set-aside times of worship. Considering these observations, it is reasonable to conclude that the Church must embrace more flexible and adaptable models of teaching and instruction if the Church is to ensure wisdom is being imparted to the youth of today.

Upon identifying the common points of intersection where teaching, instruction, and scripture meet, there must be a dialogue between the academy and the Church. Further, the Church must engage in praxis to test the validity of the findings under the weightiness of youth discipleship. This is critical because for far too long, too many churches have identified the hemorrhaging of youth between thirteen to eighteen years old as being the core catalyst fueling the vanishing youth dilemma in our churches rather than being merely a symptom of a larger, malignant, and pervasive problem-discipleship. This time of postmodernity in which we live is demanding that leaders become more creative, innovative, and transformational than ever before. This is no less true than in youth discipleship. New Goshen UMC leadership acknowledges that providing biblical training and instruction to youth for wise and productive living is needed. Yet, the church does not have an established youth discipleship ministry that targets youth between ages of thirteen and eighteen. Recognizing the difficulty and the daunting task of disciplining

youth in a post-modern society, it is my belief that youth discipleship is not impossible. For that reason, I hypothesize that if the leadership participates in a six-week discipleship training curriculum with an emphasis on youth, then the leadership will increase both the knowledge and the tools needed to create a discipleship ministry targeting youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen at New Goshen UMC.

In addressing this concern, Solomon poses two main ideas that this unit highlights. The first is "behavior that measures each step with prudence and avoids the rashness of quick decision or hasty action" and the second is "justice that spares no effort to treat all members of society with fairness and to redress all grievances caused by greed or cruelty."[7] These two foci compose the necessary elements of a reliable and lasting community life, which the wise leaders of old subscribed to and religiously encouraged the youth. Proverbs 22:6, along with the entire collection of sayings in the Royal Collection Concluded, serve as a framework for "fruitful living in a culture both agrarian and urban, as directions for the leaders who had the authority and responsibility to shape the tone and structure of their society."[8]

Proverbs 22:6 is one of the most misunderstood of the Proverbs or sayings. To understand Proverbs 22:6, like all scripture, it must be heard in its original context. Therefore, Proverbs 22:6 must be understood using Proverbs 22:1 as the contextual backdrop and its relationship to Proverbs 22:5. Proverbs 22:1 is the opening verse of the chapter, but it also provides an overview of the two foci points mentioned earlier. Most

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[7] David. A. Hubbard, *The Preacher's Commentary Series*, vol. 15 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1989), 347.

[8] Hubbard, *The Preacher's Commentary Series*, 347.

people misinterpret this proverb to be a promise. Parents and leaders have the misperceived understanding that if they train their children in a godly way it is a promise that when the child grows old, he or she would not stray away from their teachings. On the contrary, Solomon is using this proverb as a warning to parents and community leaders. Solomon is warning them that if they do not teach their children the ways of God and allow them to follow their own passions and desires then their children will be filled with the foolishness of the world. Solomon, in essence, spells out in Proverbs 22:5 what a child's life outcome will be like for both the child who received godly training and the child who did not receive godly training.

In the larger context of Solomon's exhortation lies Lady Wisdom. Wisdom is the bedrock on which the pithy aphorisms in Proverbs 22:5-6 are constructed. Except through godly training and instruction being implemented at a young age, there are no other means to obtain wisdom. Hence, the godly trained child, now a wise adult, seeks what is most valuable and honored in a stable community life- a good name. This learned and lived behavior of the wise is in direct contrast to the youth who do not receive godly training and instruction. Solomon's argument of acquiring wisdom through providing continuous godly training and instruction throughout childhood is the only antidote for the poison of folly, which will ruin the youth's good name and ultimately ruin their life.

Solomon's exhortation encourages us to instruct the youth in godly wisdom because exercising godly wisdom will help them discern the right path to choose as adults. This passage of scripture reveals a deeper insight into Solomon's appreciation of his own upbringing. Solomon's father, King David, instilled in him the importance of wisdom from a young age and prepared him to succeed him as king.

As recorded in 2 Samuel 12:24, Solomon is the second son of King David. Solomon succeeded his father as King of Israel. In preparation for this succession of authority and leadership, Solomon is presented in 1 Kings chapter three in a dream where he asks YHWH for the practical wisdom of "know-how," which is essential for kings and executive leaders. "The principal story (1 Kg 3:6-14) introduces a theme of divine-dynastic alliance in which David is the kernel. The alliance is between David and YHWH and between his successor and YHWH; as a result of this alliance, wisdom is graciously awarded by God to Solomon."[9]

"The heading in 1:1 (The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel) does not necessarily mean that the entire book is written by Solomon."[10] Clarity is not provided in how these sayings are the Proverbs of Solomon. This implies either King Solomon wrote them or perhaps he compiled the sayings into a collection that was dedicated to him. Proverbs 22 is part of the "Solomonic collections." The author of the Solomonic collections is King Solomon. The Solomonic collections are comprised of Proverbs chapters ten through twenty-one and twenty-five through twenty-nine. However, Proverbs 10:1-31:9 makes up six collections of proverbs entailing sets of proverbs, which each have only a few verses.[11] "The main objective of the Wisdom discourses in Proverbs is to develop a strong sense of morality in the youth of the community, so as to ensure for them a stable life and future that includes by necessity a

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[9] Pablo Torijano Morales, "Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition," *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism* 73, no. 4 (2002).

[10] Lindsay Wilson, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Proverbs: An Introduction And Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 1.

[11] Naomi Franklin, *Proverbs, The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures From Africa And The African Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 244.

rightful place in the community."[12] Thus, the effectual good of wisdom is double-stranded. Godly wisdom is the central idea in Proverbs.

The Book of Proverbs comes from the post-exilic period except for the "Solomonic collections." The Solomonic collections come from the pre-exilic period. There is tangible material according to Shupak, which points to a portion of the Solomonic collections having an influence from the Egyptian work known as the Instruction of Amenemope. Shupak further asserts that King Solomon, author of the Solomonic collections, borrowed this Egyptian work due to the complexity and difficulty in understanding the Hebrew text. Otherwise, many of the proverbs contained in the Solomonic collections would have been challenging at best and impossible at worst to understand.[13] Hence, there is not any contemporary research to suggest that Proverbs 22:1-16 has any influence from the Egyptian material, Instruction of Amenemope.

Lloyd J. Ogilvie states that "according to David Hubbard, Proverbs was designed initially as a training manual for Israel's potential leaders."[14] However, Raymond C. Van Leeuwen contends that from the prologue, Proverbs 1:1-7, Proverbs' purpose is to train adolescent boys as they emerge into adulthood, which is littered with both problems and opportunities.[15]

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[12] Franklin, *Proverbs, The Africana Bible*, 244.

[13] Nili Shupak, *The Instruction of Amenemope and Proverbs 22:17-24-22 from the Perspective of Contemporary Research* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2005), 209-210.

[14] David A. Hubbard, *Proverbs: The Preacher's Commentary*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 10.

[15] Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary In Twelve Volumes*, vol. v. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 31.

This passage of scripture highlighted in Proverbs 22:6 provides a foretaste of Solomon's view and understanding of divine retribution. For example, in 22: 5a, "thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked," suggesting being caught up in thorns and snares is a result of receiving divine spiritual punishment for not "guarding the soul" (Pro. 22:5b ESV). Solomon is not saying that thorns and snares are placed in the world by God for youth to fall prey to. Rather, thorns and snares are present in the world because the world exists in a fallen state. Thorns and snares are used to contrast the life of a youth who makes good choices as opposed to a youth who does not make good choices. Thus, a good choice implies making the choice to follow the ways of God. If a youth chooses not to guard their soul, then it is their fate to experience a life filled with thorns and snares, which is a contrast to the youth who chooses to follow the ways of God, whose life is not filled with thorns and snares but rewarded with protection from thorns and snares entangling their life. Just as the text does not impose a single means on leaders who teach and instruct youth in making the choice to follow the ways of God, this same adaptable and flexible approach must be subscribed to by leaders of the Church Universal and New Goshen UMC if it is to realize its youth developing and deepening their relationship with God and ultimately making a positive contribution to society.

Knowing that naivety and gullibility are part and parcel of youth, Solomon suggests that if the youth are to avoid a life chock-full of thorns and snares, parents and community leaders, which includes the Church, must play a vital role early on and continuously in the youth's life. Solomon declares that the role that parents and community leaders must assume is that of a teacher or instructor.

The Book of Proverbs, along with Ecclesiastes and Songs of Songs, are three compositions that make up the body of work attributed to Solomon. All three compositions are part of the wisdom literature corpus. This wisdom literature is more than likely connected to a school of wisdom.

Without this biblical foundation, it leaves New Goshen UMC an exit to absolve itself from the responsibility of following God's command to teach and instruct the next generation. Thus, this excerpt of research concretized in the biblical scripture of Proverbs 22:6 is critical in that it exhibits an existing biblical foundation that promulgates an absolute truth upon which rests the need for leadership in the Church to teach and instruct the youth that wisdom will be increased. The chief cornerstone of that foundation is there is a vantage point that lies completely within the purview of the Triune God for leadership to embrace flexible and adaptive methods for disciplining youth. Building upon this foundational premise of leadership being adaptable and flexible in the methodology used in youth discipleship, it is critical moving forward to identify the task analysis to be used to achieve the goal of equipping leaders with increased knowledge and skills in leading a youth discipleship ministry. This consideration is essential to avoid excluding any leaders within the congregation.

Since God first introduces adaptability and flexibility in scripture, and the Eastern and Western traditions alike agree that scripture is the primary source of truth; hence, it by scripture, affirmed by the traditions of the Church, that it is reasonable to conclude these attributes must also exist in the Christian believer. Anticipating a certain degree of biblical illiteracy provides organic opportunities for the Senior Servant Leader to teach and preach that there is and has always been the existence of the relationship between

God, adaptability, flexibility, and teaching. Every newly developed teaching and instructional pedagogy bears the image of God within its archetypal design. All teaching and instructional pedagogies perhaps were developed out of the genius of creativity, compassion, and a conscious need. Suggestively, there is only a brief interlude between development and a fall from grace when the teaching and instructional pedagogy is used beyond or outside its intended purpose. God chose Israel to participate in the salvific history of redemption, restoration, deliverance, and liberation for humanity. Therefore, humanity's understanding of its responsibility regarding teaching and instruction must also bear witness to redemption, restoration, deliverance, and liberation. In critiquing teaching and instructional pedagogies, often, the pedagogical construct does not require redemptive grace, but rather, the manipulative ways in which humans interact with the teaching pedagogy are what stands in need of God's redemptive and restorative grace. This is the compassionate work that requires one to use a cauterized scalpel to cut away the sin-diseased area while simultaneously redeeming and restoring the soul to the image of God.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

New Goshen UMC now has increased biblical knowledge in the need to be adaptable and flexible in teaching and instructing the youth which leads to a deeper relationship with God and a wholesome society. It is now incumbent upon New Goshen UMC to examine how teaching and instructing youth through the medium of historical institutions and organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) have impacted spiritual, social, and moral behavior in American culture, African American culture, and the Universal Church. The impact the YMCA has made on these spaces and places throughout history has influenced young males to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly before God. To reiterate, teaching and instructing the youth have always been at the core of the ecclesiology of the Church. Perhaps, due to living in a culture where youth is much more isolated and insulated, one may have forgotten that historically, the Church and the community played a vital role in ensuring that youth grew in Christlikeness and matriculated into productive citizens.

Throughout history, society has been imbued with the tangible and visible forms of Christian ethics that predate the genesis of the YMCA. Charles Howard Hawkins expressed, "A fresh embodiment of the Christian ethic has come into being whenever the Christian religion has burst the bands of institutionalism and overflowed as a new and

vital movement."[1] When one considers the impact the fundamental teachings and instructions the early Church had on youths, the catechism was primarily used to teach and instruct youth regarding the beliefs of the Church and morals for right living. The early Church recognized and understood the need to prepare the youth for spiritual and wholesome community life. In the Middle Ages, it was common to witness monasteries established by various religious orders, such as the Celtic and Benedictine monastic orders. Their chief aim was to teach and instruct young men and women in the ways of living for God as a community of faith. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was the rise of scholasticism. Schools were built to teach and instruct youth in ethical and moral behavior using the disciplines of theology, logic, and reason.

Progressing to modern times, churches began to implement outreach programs and events to the youth through Vacation Bible School (VBS), youth explosions, youth conferences/summits, youth discipleship ministry, and youth Sundays. What is unquestionable is teaching and instructing youth in the doctrines of the Church, and moral principles have historically been viewed as a necessity if youth were to have their identity restored in the image of God and community life was to flourish.

The panoptic view being presented is that through every iteration of time in which teaching and instructing youth in Christian doctrine and ethical living has taken place, each generation and every aspect of society, including the Church, has benefited. This panoptic view also captures the efforts in teaching and instructing youth in Christian beliefs and ethical living, which extends beyond the breadth and length of the Church. One organization whose missional work was to teach and instruct young men in

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[1] Charles Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1951), 3.

developing and living out Christian and moral principles was witnessed through the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

In the mid-nineteenth century, the model of Sunday School emerged for the first time in the church. This new conceptualized model called Sunday School was initially centered around age groups for youth, which focused on instructing and training youth in their Christian faith. Simultaneously, as the church model of Sunday School was emerging, America also witnessed the organized movement of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) sweep across American cities like a firestorm. The YMCA movement fueled what would be an ongoing wave of other parachurch organizations collaborating with the church. "The Y ministry placed Youth Ministry in a different setting outside the Church for the first time and began a public movement of Christianity in the marketplace." The history of youth discipleship is an extraordinary voyage; however, it is somewhat daunting to chart on a timeline.

History of the YMCA Movement

George Williams was a haberdasher, which was a highly coveted occupational path for young men. The work of the draper or haberdasher attracted many young men as they migrated to various major cities to fill the job vacancies created because of the Industrial Revolution. These large cities where these young men were flocking to achieve some degree of upward socio-economic mobility were littered with bars and taverns. There were very few healthy and wholesome activities for the young men to engage in. The lack of wholesome and healthy activities for young men drawn to these major cities by the ushering in of the Industrial Revolution greatly disturbed Williams. It was during a

Bible study with Williams and eleven of his colleagues that the idea of the YMCA was birthed. Thus, on June 6, 1844, in London, England, the first meeting was held by George Williams and his friends, which led to the founding of the YMCA.[2]

The YMCA finds its organization spreading beyond the boundaries of London primarily due to the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was held in Hyde Park, London. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first of many world fairs highlighting industry and culture. As a result of the popularity of the first Great Exhibition, YMCAs began to appear in Asia, North America, Europe, and Australia. Even though the boundaries of the YMCA spread beyond London under the leadership of George Williams, it was the vision of Henry Dunant, secretary of YMCA Geneva, who globalized the YMCA and created an international headquarters.[3]

With its world headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the YMCA has a geographical footprint that spans 120 countries. George Williams's central purpose in creating the YMCA was to deposit Christian values in young men, which would be displayed in all areas of their lives. The young men would be expected to live out their Christian values as their minds, bodies, and spirits were developed.[4]

Now that New Goshen United Methodist Church understands the essential need to provide biblical and moral training to its youth, it must also view through a historical lens

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[2] Rob James, "The YMCA at 175: From a Small Drapery Store to a Global Christian Youth Movement," Christian Today, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/the-ymca-at-175-from-a-small-drapery-store-to-a-global-christian-youth-movement/.

[3] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 6.

[4] Corinne Chapponnmere, *Henry Dunant: The Man of the Red Cross* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 23-24.

how biblical and moral training have been employed throughout history by institutions and organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Moreover, New Goshen UMC must contemplate how this organization has left its historical footprint around the globe, throughout the Americas, and ultimately on the Christian Church. The crucible mark left by the YMCA and other parachurch organizations and institutions has created a historical framework or pedagogy that has become a manual or a guide in providing biblical and moral training to youth. Therefore, offering this commentary from the historical vantage point of organizations such as that of the YMCA, providing biblical and moral training for youth is part and parcel of the ecclesiology and missiology of Christ Church.

> Previous YMCA youth work training programmes placed material emphasis upon ensuring students were equipped to evangelise the Christian faith. Biblical Studies, Theology and preparation for Discipleship were unfailingly granted due weight within the syllabus. This time the focus was on creating a space where people could develop as youth and community workers in different settings – much as envisaged in the Government report *Youth and Community Work in the 70s* (Tash was a member of the Committee that produced the report).[5]

Understanding the nature of whom the YMCA was envisioned to become and the purpose of its existence, preparing, and equipping workers in the United States and Europe to work with young men was at the core of the organization. The YMCA was growing in popularity. YMCAs were springing up in many major cities in the Northeast and Midwest of the United States. The demand for youth workers, as well as the desire to work with youth, was in high demand. The YMCA developed training programs, certification programs, and associate degree programs to ensure there were qualified

[5] Tony Jeffs, "YMCA and Youth Work Education," Youth and Policy, https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/ymca-youth-work-education/.

youth workers to work with and provide direct instruction to the many youths who descended on these larger cities. The YMCA training programs and colleges offered courses in the disciplines of physical education, biblical studies, ethics, and community education. The curriculum goal was to provide alternative training to young men, which promoted spiritual growth and the avoidance of the vices and criminal elements found in these cities. The YMCA training curriculum hailed the ideology that biblical and moral instruction was for the edification of every area of the young male's life. Thus, the training was not merely to aid in spiritual formation or spiritual growth in the young male. Rather, the chief aim of the curriculum was to equip and prepare the youth workers with the necessary skills and tools to educate young men on how to grow into men who possessed Christ-like virtues in all areas of their lives.

Just as founder George Williams, along with the other eleven charter members, recognized the criminal and destructive elements that existed in the larger cities during the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the negative impact it had on the young men and the community, so must New Goshen UMC's leadership become keenly aware of the destructive, unproductive, and criminal elements which youth face in the Goshen community which surrounds the church and the Goshen school and Greater Greensboro. George Williams founded the YMCA to provide young men with an alternative to participating in activities that lacked moral worth. George Williams' goal was to identify the young men who were flocking into these large cities who were coming from smaller, rural, slow-paced areas where religion was often the central and connecting focus of the town. Williams intuitively knew this influx of young men would be susceptible to falling prey to the criminal and destructive elements that existed in the cities and needed a

positive environment that provided biblical teaching, Christian fellowship, and a standard for the young men to emulate in their daily lives.

New Goshen UMC must understand that this problem existed in the mid-nineteenth century, and it is the same problem they are facing today in their twenty-first century post-pandemic context. There has been an increase in youth crime and violent activity in Greensboro, North Carolina, with the largest percentage of increase in arrests related to youth crime, violence, and gang-related activity being among African American youth. It is not my goal to highlight the statistical discrepancies between actual crime activity and arrests among racial ethnicities. Rather, to point out that there are satanic attacks being waged against youth, especially African American youth in the community where New Goshen UMC is located. Thus, New Goshen UMC, as Christ's Church, has a biblical command found in Proverbs 22:6 to teach and instruct the youth in the ways of God to live a holy life and enjoy a peaceful community. This requires New Goshen UMC to take a closer look at the problems that plague the community because otherwise, many would raise the question—has the African American Church failed the African American youth? In other words, the African American Church has an ecclesiological and missiological responsibility to African American Youth. Although a problem that plagues New Goshen UMC, this problem of the necessity to provide alternative Christian teaching and instruction to youth is germane to the body of Christ. Through the lens of scripture and history, the Christian Church is only the Christian Church when it passes down its faith and Christian beliefs and practices to the next generation through teaching and instructing youth in Christian and moral principles to

guard themselves against the destructive traps of the world and contribute to stable community life.

This notion that young men would join around a shared cause and show their unwavering loyalty is not a new phenomenon. Since Jesus Christ summoned twelve young men from various backgrounds and occupations to follow Him and hear the "Good News," young people have committed their lives to moral and ethical living.

At least once during each generation, beginning in the early eighteenth century, revivals began to break out all over America and Europe. As revivals swept over America and Europe like evangelical wildfires, there were lasting results. One of the permanent remnants resulting from the evangelical revivals within "the endless inventiveness of the ongoing Christian life and in the development of social organizations is the Young Men's Christian Association."[6] During the Middle Ages, the fraternal brotherhood of monasteries, as well as many other long-forgotten devout youths, were the tangible expression of the essence of Christian life. These devout and dedicated Christian youth groups associated "for religious conversation," to encourage each other, for the "prevention of ye mischief arising from vain company," for "religious debate and theological discussion," as nurseries of the churches," or for the spreading and disseminating the Christian idea of overseas missions.[7] Through each recorded occurrence, surviving across generations and even sometimes centuries, one can witness the shared commonality of all being the unique Christian response to a particular need in

[6] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 4.

[7] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 3-4.

society. In the same vein, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was birthed out of that same Christian response to meet a felt need.

Birthed by the inspiration of eighteenth-century evangelical revivals, the YMCA was intentional about boosting the spiritual life of the young men who worked in the trade industries by holding religious gatherings among them. As a former Sunday school teacher in Bridgewater, George Williams studied the works of Charles G. Finney. Finney's work was a practical gospel addressing moral issues with a non-denominational focus. Following his apprenticeship in 1841, Williams gained employment with Hitchcock and Rogers firm in St. Paul's Churchyard, London. There, the workday was long and included many young men. Williams found that most of his workday was spent with the young men. Williams found this work arrangement beneficial as he also resided with many of these young men who were like-minded. This work-living arrangement allowed Williams to share Finney's work as well as his desire for the improvement of the spiritual condition of his co-workers.[8]

Out of sharing Finney's work and his yearnings came a prayer meeting as the center focus which improved these young men's spiritual condition but also provided wholesome fellowship for the young men. Within two years, this continued prayer meeting with the young men saw an increase in the morals and morale of the firm. This was evidenced by the director of the firm accepting Jesus Christ and increased financial support of this young movement that Williams had begun. Williams' desire to see the

[8] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 5.

spiritual condition of these young men improve was not limited to the dry goods firm he worked at in St. Paul's Churchyard.[9]

This idea of improving young men's spiritual condition in the cities extended to other firms in the city. This was the catalyst that launched the founding of the Young Men's Christian Association on June 6, 1844. The name of this fellowship was proposed by Williams's dormitory roommate, who was also one of the twelve founding members, Christopher Smith. This fellowship reflected elements of Finney's work by reaching across ecumenical lines. The association was comprised of young men from the Church of England, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist traditions.[10] It is difficult to determine Williams' contribution to the organization of the YMCA since there are not any existing documents to support it; however, Williams' remaining life was dedicated to this movement.

Concluding the first meeting, one of the twelve original founding members journaled on the mission of the group as being "to influence young men to spread the Redeemer's Kingdom amongst those by whom they are surrounded."[11] It did not take long for this mission statement to expand to include psychological well-being. Out of this concern for mental stability came a curated series of public lectures, which became known as the "Exeter Hall Lectures." These lecture series, along with crossing ecumenical boundaries, were instrumental in the growth the association would experience. Moreover, allowing young men to participate in the association who were not

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[9] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 5.

[10] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 5.

[11] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 5.

professing Christians fueled significant growth. Young men who did not profess Christianity as their faith were allowed to participate in the association as associate members and enjoy Christian teaching, instruction, and fellowship but were restricted from voting or holding an office. This substantial growth caused the association to change its meeting venues from small coffee houses to larger venues in the city to accommodate the size to which the association had grown.[12]

In a culture where more and more youth do not profess Christianity as their faith, it is important for New Goshen UMC not to restrict the youth they are trying to reach to Methodist youth who have drifted away from the church or Christian youth from other denominations. The yearning must be for the spiritual and moral improvement of all youth, regardless of their religious affiliation or lack of religious affiliation. If the initial mission of the YMCA was to make Christ known among all young men so that the young men could, in turn, share the "Good News" with all around them, this should be the chief aim of New Goshen UMC. Many times, when churches express their desire to disciple the youth, they do not include the youth who have an extremely troubled background. For example, the ideal youth relates to family and friends but rarely is their youth discipleship for youth who are felons. New Goshen must be careful not to fall into this pattern of thinking. Just as in Acts 3:5, there are more youth on the portico that need Christian teaching and instructing than those inside the temple. Following the footprint of the YMCA, New Goshen UMC must yearn to reach as many youths as possible without creating barriers that cut off access to Christian discipleship. Being an inclusive association is one of the key factors that promoted growth within the YMCA.

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[12] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 5.

It was under the leadership of T. H. Tarlton, secretary in 1845, that the association experienced even faster growth. Tarlton was aggressive in his approaches to grow the association which led to the establishment of the first branch that year in West End. The West End branch housed a library and offered courses in various subjects. By 1851, the association's growth was exponential. There were numerous new branches established. There were associations started in sixteen other cities throughout Europe, including England, Scotland, and Ireland. The news of the success the YMCA was enjoying spread quickly, which attracted earlier continental societies to join this Christian brotherhood. Though there were a myriad of occupational and faith backgrounds that merged into the association, the common bond that they all shared was the spiritual welfare of young men. This commonality brought these various groups together to form a global allegiance by 1855. The YMCA became such a phenomenon across Europe and England that George Williams was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1894 on the YMCA's fiftieth golden anniversary of the London Association. At this time, there were five thousand associations in twenty-four countries with a half million members.[13]

Spreading across the Atlantic Ocean quickly into North America with the founding of associations in Boston, Massachusetts, and Montreal, Canada, however, epic growth would be witnessed in the much larger cities. Dredged in the throes of slavery as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was released in 1852, the YMCA was founded in the United States.[14] The events that were taking place in the nation were also

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[13] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 6.

[14] Nina Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 8.

taking place within the YMCA. The YMCA was divided about slavery during the 1850s. The leaders of the YMCA were intentionally reserved and restrained in addressing slavery as a moral problem to avoid fracturing the organization.

In 1852, a YMCA was established in New York by George H. Petrie. The New York YMCA members received instructions to recruit "young men taking up their residence in New York and its vicinity and endeavor to bring them under moral and religious influences by aiding them in the selection of suitable boarding places and employment…securing their attendance at some place of worship on the Sabbath and by every means in their power surrounding them with Christian associates."[15] YMCAs were quickly established in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco amid a bumper crop economy on the heels of the Civil War. At the start of the Civil War, the Confederation of North American YMCA dissolved. The South fared slightly better, leaving only two YMCAs in existence. To remain relevant, the associations in the North established the United States Christian Commission.[16] By the time of the Great Depression, most large urban and metro centers in the United States had a YMCA building in their city. From the onset of the Civil War through the conclusion of World War I, main streets all over America had a face lift with the addition of YMCAs constructed in their city view. There were over 1000 YMCAs built.[17]

The first Americans encountered the YMCA in 1851 while attending the World's Fair in London. Around this time, large urban cities in America became desirable to large

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[15] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness,* 10.

[16] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 8.

[17] Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern UrbanCulture.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

numbers of young men. The influx of young men concerned the city residents, who were exposed to these young single men to the "moral hazards" of city life.

The YMCAs were founded by white-collar workers for white-collar workers. This was the case, with only a few exceptions, and remained comprised of this socio-economic class. The middle class highly embraced the YMCA as "a viable urban alternative for the web of supportive moral institutions," which they believed the young men left behind as they moved into the city.[18] Sherwood Eddy expressed in 1944, "this little realized limitation has unfortunately characterized, to a large extent, both the Associations and the churches of Britain and America throughout the entire YMCA century."[19] Williams, founder of the YMCA, and Hitchcock, Williams' employer, are a representation of the socio-economic classes to which the YMCA was to be the most indebted and would give the most. Unlike the Wesleyan revivals of the eighteenth century in Britain and the Great Awakening in America, which attracted the working classes, the revivals of the early nineteenth century appealed to and had the greatest impact on the middle class, which lived in large urban cities as well as small rural towns.

The YMCAs would become an alternative for young men living in the hustling, bustling, fast-paced cities that were overridden by a dark element of crime, vice, prohibition, and violence. Likewise, it is imperative that the leadership of New Goshen UMC view themselves as an alternative to the dark elements of life, which is not uncommon in the communities that surround New Goshen UMC. Youth discipleship ministry for youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen must be the alternative

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[18] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 8.

[19] Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 6.

presented to the youth in the local community. It was not until plight and poverty, degradation, and dilapidation reached an all-time high that it evoked evangelistic and missional concern. However, it was experiencing the pangs of these societal burdens that the YMCA thrived as a counterculture agent to alcoholism, drugs, gambling, prostitution, crime world, and a plethora of other spiritual wickedness that began to rise within the large cities. The attraction as a counterculture agent was largely due to a large proportion of the residents in these large cities were young men.

After the Civil War, the Confederation of North American YMCAs was reorganized. There was a push by the Confederation of North American YMCAs for African Americans to join them and participate in the annual conference, however, in segregated associations. At the 1871 convention, it was declared that the YMCA "has no politics and knows no distinction among men except those who love Christ and those who love Him not."[20] The Confederation of North American YMCA recognized the moral rightness of African Americans joining the association. During Reconstruction, several African American YMCAs were established but were short-lived. This short lifespan of the African American YMCAs was primarily due to the requirement of being financially self-sufficient. African Americans lacked financial resources. The preceding rhetoric of the Confederation of North American YMCA to financially support African American YMCAs failed to materialize. Thus, their support "barely went beyond convention oratory."[21]

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[20] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 17.

[21] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness,* 17.

The primary barrier restricting YMCA from providing aid to African American YMCAs was incorporated into the organization's polity and governing structure. The YMCA was comprised of self-governing, financially independent groups which were not financially supported by its central body. This decentralized governance left the African American YMCAs to completely fund and organize themselves. Facing this struggle, African American YMCAs were required to organize groups of young men and raise money within the African American communities.[22]

Even though the YMCA theoretically supported the establishment of African American YMCA work, it did so without addressing the primary dilemmas by which African American communities were challenged— hamstrung by little financial resources. The African American community needed more than inspiring words and convention oratory to be successful in YMCA work. Despite the encouragement from the YMCA, African Americans found it extremely difficult to establish their own YMCAs. Anthony Bowen, a former slave from Maryland, established the first African American YMCA in Washington, DC, in 1853.[23]

It was one year after the establishment of the White YMCA that Anthony Bowen established a YMCA for African Americans. Bowen organized this association and became its first president. Unlike the White YMCAs, this African American YMCA did not own physical property and was unable to secure a physical location. The association conducted its meeting in Bowen's home on Sunday afternoons. Hampered by limited financial resources and handcuffed by laws that minimized the personal liberties of freed

[22] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 17.

[23] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 18.

African Americans, the first African American YMCA in the United States presented its members merely Bible study gatherings.[24] While faced with obstacles, the African American YMCA in Washington, D. C., continued to exist throughout the Civil War but "never evolved beyond club status."[25] Historians have not unearthed any records to substantiate the existence of any other African American YMCAs before the Civil War.

African Americans established several YMCAs in the years of the post-Civil War despite a persistent shortage of financial resources. In 1866, African Americans established YMCAs in New York, Charleston, South Carolina, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1867. It was in December 1866 when the Washington, D.C. association, originally founded by Anthony Bowen, was reorganized and revitalized by the Rev. James A. Handy. The re-organization and the revitalization of the first African American YMCA brought about a deviation from the mission of the White YMCA.[26]

In restructuring the Washington, D.C. association, these African American men altered their constitution to reflect the needs of young African American men as well as the African American community. This constitution clearly reflected that African Americans championed YMCA work for different reasons than white YMCAs. White YMCAs deemed the YMCA as an organization that protected the Christian values of young men who had migrated to the city by bringing them into the fellowship and discipleship of Christian brotherhood. The leaders of the African American YMCA in

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[24] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 18.

[25] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 18.

[26] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 18.

Washington, D.C., wholeheartedly shared their views. However, they also viewed association work as a vehicle to jumpstart racial advancement. These African American leaders declared their goal to be "the mental, moral, spiritual improvement of our race."[27] It was the founder's belief that because of an environment conducive to moral well-being African Americans could achieve "mental, moral, and Christian equality" as well as make role models for the African American community to emulate and imitate.[28] If the African American YMCAs were to realize their goals of improving moral well-being and making racial advancements for the African American community, they would need the representation of a national organization such as the YMCA.

This proved to be true as the YMCA began to shift in the direction of embracing a Social Gospel which would be beneficial to addressing the overlooked and unmet needs of the African American community, thus promising racial advancement and moral wholesomeness. It is in this vein that emerges from these goals of improved moral well-being and racial advancement of African Americans the cross-pollinated results of the Social Gospel, the YMCA, and the religious left following World War I.[29]

Between 1907 and 1916, the largest Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Church and ecumenical bodies, began incorporating social principles into their doctrinal standards. As a result of these large denominational and ecumenical bodies adopting social principles into their core beliefs, agencies were created which championed justice in organized labor. However, as many scholars have noted, these

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[27] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness*, 18.

[28] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness,* 18.

[29] Mjagkig, *Light in Darkness,* 18.

efforts of reform primarily were for the elite Protestant culture, which reflected the most revered churches, denominational leaders and their academic parallels. At the same time, Walter Rauschenbusch raised the argument in "The Social Principles of Jesus" that the primary end of Christianity was greater than merely transforming religious institutions but rather the work that the Social Gospel was charged with was to pervade society with the spirit of Jesus.[30]

From their observations in 1917, Harry F. Ward and Richard Henry Edwards, two Social Gospel leaders, expressed that Christianity manifested as a lifestyle would not be any less than a spiritual revolution that would infuse the social and moral tapestry of the nation.[31] The conviction of Ward and Edwards that Christianity should be critiqued for its effectiveness as a means of grace to move Americans to promote a spirit of cooperation within the nation. This dogmatic belief of Ward and Edwards left them exposed to critics such as Reinhold Niebuhr to postulate a myopic worldview of the Social Gospel. Niebuhr critiqued Social Gospel proponents as having "naïve faith in the power of Jesus' love to engage the complexity of modern social problems."[32]

To fully gain an appreciation of the grassroots movement of the religious left in the twentieth century, one must accurately analyze the dynamics of an earlier Progressive Era Social Gospel. One must examine the philosophical and theoretical thinking related to the lived experience and how this meta-narrative was spread beyond the institutions of Protestant strong towers through such organizations as the YMCA. As an African

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[30] Christopher Evans, *The Social Gospel, the YMCA, and the Emergence of the Religious Left After WWI* (Cham, SW: Springes International Publishing, 2018), 42.

[31] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 42-43.

[32] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 43.

American United Methodist congregation located in a predominately African American community, the leadership of New Goshen UMC must view youth discipleship as both a means to promote spiritual growth and to transform the community. Youth discipleship must exit the building to reach a demographic of youth who are unchurched and are placed at risk due to the social ills of society. Otherwise, New Goshen UMC will find it not only impossible to obey the divine command of holy scripture; it will also find it impossible to live out the mission of the United Methodist Church: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[33]

There were two central themes at the nerve center of the Protestant Social Gospel after World War I: the highest order of fruits meet for repentance, which guides one's moral compass are produced through religion, and second, the desired end of Christianity rests within the entrails of a just democratic society. The notable Social Gospel proponent Eugene Lyman wrote in 1914, "[Jesus] universalized the prophetic consciousness itself; that is, he opened to everyone the same sense of God's nearness and power, the same sense of having an inspiration and a mission direct from God, which the ancient prophets had."[34] To say it another way, to be a Christian demands the individual give their whole self to the vigorous work of letting loose the religious, radical, revolutionary power of the first-century Jesus upon the twentieth century. Harry Emerson Fosdick further stressed in "Manhood of the Master" that Christian masculinity and the ability to adhere to the prophetic teachings of Jesus are connected to each other.[35] Fosdick expressed without any

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[33] Brian, K. Milford, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), Paragraph 120.

[34] Evans, *The Social Gospel,* 44.

[35] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 48.

uncertainty that resolve, integrity, and personal commitment were required to be a follower of Jesus.[36] "Are you really a patriot for the Cause of the Master?" Can he rely on you at all costs to be loyal?"[37] Even though these authors never wavered from the missionary ideals of the YMCA, they charged their readers to look within and without institutional Christianity for signals pointing to the Kingdom of God.

Edward Steiner, a professor at Grinnell College, asked the poignant and searching question regarding the impact of the Church on an individual's religion when he asked, "Will the church catch the spirit of rising democracy, and adjust herself to profit by it, or will she sluggishly ignore it until the time of vantage has passed?"[38] As sobering as this pre-World War I question may have been, this interrogative of Steiner's to Protestant youth would ultimately shift to the core of the YMCA's mission post-World War I. It was the increase in the predominant interest being placed on Social Gospel themes in the YMCA as well as other movements led by Protestant students prior to the First World War which became the impetus for transforming the YMCA's mission following the war. Young Protestant students had issued a challenge that the YMCA could no longer genuflect to the altars of institutionalized Christianity but rather had to modify its core missional beliefs to embrace the practical theology of Rev. Theodore Parker and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice."[39]

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[36] Evans, *The Social Gospel,* 48.

[37] Evans, *The Social Gospel,* 48.

[38] Evans, *The Social Gospel,* 48.

[39] Theodore Parker, *The Magnet and the Iron: John Brown and George L. Stearns,* Tufts, https://exhibits.tufts.edu/spotlight/john-brown-tufts/about/theodore-parker.

Edward Eddy was one the most prolific figures who spearheaded the dissemination of the Social Gospel ideology within the YMCA and the at-large Protestant student movement. Eddy, the International Secretary of the YMCA, left a legacy by using his status in the YMCA to create networks among Social Gospel leaders on the religious left. Eddy led seminars abroad in the Soviet Union, where his critique of the Soviet Union undergirded the ideal that marked the YMCA's mission. This missional theme was the consistent stance that if America were to fully live to the ideals of democracy, it would require the purging of the sin of racism. Notwithstanding American YMCAs practicing racial segregation at the national level, it was those such as Eddy and Page who shined a spotlight on how racism showcased one of America's great moral perplexities.[40] However, it was Page who noted that White Protestant churches were largely culpable for racism. Page would go on to express, "First, man White Christians hold the extreme attitude toward the inferiority of Negroes and support discriminatory measures; and, second, by silence, evasion, and neglect they permit unjust measures to be perpetuated."[41]

The YMCA formed a partnership with the organization Fellowship of Reconciliation Reconciliation (FOR) to promote conferences and gatherings that brought youth together to discuss issues centered around a host of concerns related to the abuses of capitalism and racism. This YMCA activism emphasized the ideal that the litmus of Christianity was not embedded within Church doctrine but rather had its existence in the lived experience. It would be Benjamin Mays, who served on the national board of the

[40] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 50.

[41] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 50.

YMCA, that stated religious truth "is more than creeds and more than dogmas; it is neither form nor rituals; it is more than the Bible itself, for religious experience created all these; before they were, religion was—destroy them and the meaning and place of religion and human history will remain unchanged."[42]

The history of the YMCA is significant for understanding its evolution from a courier of traditional Protestant evangelicalism to becoming an organization that embraced the radical iterations of social reform and a conduit for spreading the religious themes of the Social Gospel in a manner that was instrumental to the promising development of the religious left. YMCA radicals exerted their religious views of God's justice in ways that moved society away from institutional Christianity. The YMCA, along with other Protestant youth organizations, held in common the central belief that the nature of Christianity was to institute the transformation of society to mirror the Reign of God—a place and people that permeates peace and social equality.[43]

The core religious ideal of the Social Gospel cleared the way to develop leaders who had a passion for the work of the YMCA and the tenets of the Social Gospel. One such individual was Julius Rosenwald. Julius Rosenwald provided the financial resources to build the first African American YMCA in Chicago. It was the efforts of Rosenwald, the Jewish German president of Sears and Roebuck, who bridged the gap in relationship building with African Americans and the Jewish community in establishing YMCAs in African American communities. African American YMCA leaders saw this act of benevolence from Rosenwald as the YMCA demonstrating "respectability politics, racial

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[42] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 51.

[43] Evans, *The Social Gospel*, 56.

unity, and progressive tendencies."[44] For the African American YMCA leaders, this represented to society that an African American young man could be a fully developed product of the YMCA program.

Examining the history of the YMCA is critical in laying a foundation for impressing upon today's church leadership that throughout history, organizations have recognized the need to disciple youth to develop their sense of the imago dei as well as to become productive citizens, which helps create stable community life. Research on the YMCA allows a vantage of how youth discipleship unfolded in the previous century, the challenges that were faced, and how the leaders managed that tension. Foundationally, the history of the YMCA lays the building blocks of building on moving discipling youth beyond the walls and realm of Protestant institutionalism rooted in creeds and dogma into the shared realm of the lived experience. It was the practice of John Wesley, founder of the American Methodist movement who also defined the understanding of theology to how to live out the creeds and affirmations of the Church as we respond to the overtures of God's grace. Just as the YMCA shifted its religious missional belief, it is reflective of strands of Wesleyan theology that the Social Gospel ideal becomes a means of grace that through one's actions, the Lord Jesus Christ is made known to the world.[45]

The major movement within the YMCA continues to impact how youth are discipled today. The YMCA's implementation and shifts make the Social Gospel part and parcel of youth discipleship, especially within the African American church. Even though

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[44] William Hamilton Fernandez, "To Dissipate Prejudice: Julius Rosenwald, the Evolution of Philanthropic Capital, and the Wabash YMCA," University of Chicago, https://knowledge.uchicago.edu.

[45] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1994), 215.

there seems to be some degree of latency among White Protestant churches, there is a continued exertion of religious idealism among American and international youth to shift the landscape.

New Goshen UMC must be just as intentional as the YMCA in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in being flexible and adaptive in its core belief in safeguarding the moral well-being of young people if they are to effectively disciple youth in the twenty-first century. The YMCA continues to teach and instruct youth to improve their moral values in a way that is representative of the Kingdom of God. The YMCA's measured and calculated decision to champion the full inclusion of all people, which encompasses the youth, is the vehicle by which the love of Jesus is made known to society. It is the expectation that this research will be sifted and incorporated into developing the knowledge and tools of the New Goshen UMC leadership, aimed to equip them to effectively disciple youth who are living in a morally corrupt, digital, post-pandemic milieu.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

An acceptance of the Great Commission is an acceptance of the Church understanding its role and carrying out its responsibility of disciple-making, which is to help all people learn of Jesus, believe in Jesus, obey the commands of Jesus, and lead others to Jesus. Simply put, discipleship is part and parcel of the DNA of the Church. Discipleship is a category of the Church which God designed to provide an understanding of what God expects from the Church. The practice of discipleship is a responsibility the Church must be committed to fulfilling if the Church is to fully live into the essence of its existence and the purpose for its existence. It is Howard Thurman, the theologian, scholar, mystic, and minister, who reminds us that "commitment means that it is possible for a man to yield the nerve center of his consent to a purpose or cause, a movement or an ideal, which may be more important to him than whether he lives or dies."[1]

Albeit, in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations for the transformation of the world, this is not our introduction to discipleship. Notwithstanding the term discipleship is never used in the Old Testament, we meet the Progenitor of Discipleship in Genesis chapter one. For the first time, the Progenitor of Discipleship is teaching that God exists, but not only does God exist, but it

[1] John Piippo, "Spirituality of Howard Thurman," John Piippo, https://www.johnpiippo.com/2013/07/spirituality-of-howard-thurman.html.

is God that has created everything out of nothing, including humankind. Teaching that it is God who spoke time into existence, day and night, yet not constrained by the restriction of time. Showcases the sovereignty of God while simultaneously showcasing God's compassion toward humanity in the bending of God's tender ear to hear the cry of humanity as it has spiraled into depravity due to its inability to connect with God. God teaches first-generation humanity in Genesis 1:26 about the Trinity. "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness," (Gen. 1:26a, NRSV). We see God engaged in first-generation disciple-making regarding the doctrine of God, creation, sin, salvation, and the end times.

It is in Genesis 2:18 that this Cursor, the divine carrier of the Word, is teaching an illustrative lesson on the priority of humanity's vertical relationship with God. However, it is without contradiction that humanity's horizontal relationships with each other were to assist and help in the furtherance of the vertical relationship with God. The historical origins of discipleship point to God. Not only in the existence of God but also in the creation of humanity. God chooses to reveal God's self and God's desires to human creation through the disciple-making process. God teaches Adam and Eve the attributes and characteristics of God's love, grace, forgiveness, redemption, and salvation through concrete lived and shared experiences. This discipleship process occurred through God's gracious invitation to Adam and Eve to follow God. God is calling Adam and Eve to commune with and learn of God.

In this daily communion with God, Adam and Eve were invited into deeper spaces with God to learn of the inexhaustible facets of God. This disciple-making process was to instruct them on how to maintain and enjoy their relationship with God. The

disciple-making process would strengthen their relationship with God through reason and their spiritual senses. God is teaching, making disciples through their lived realities of creation care, free will, obedience, community, joy, and trust. Therefore, discipleship was practical in its theological construction. The disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is their rejected response to God's call to follow God. God has provided wise counsel and instruction in Genesis 2: 16-17. The end state of discipleship is to know the goodness of God and participate in God since discipleship is at the heart of becoming Christ-like or casting a self-reflection of the image of God (*Imago Dei)*.

Through Adam and Eve's rejected response to the open invitation to follow God created a major problem not only for them but for the entirety of humanity. This conundrum, which yoked to the soul of humanity, separates a holy God from an unholy creation, is sin. Sin darkens the soul and makes it impossible to see a clear reflection of the image of God in our souls. Sin caused an estrangement in the fellowship and discipleship between God and humanity. The estrangement between God and humanity caused by sin left humanity without any means to restore the relationship, thus, an abrupt halt to the disciple-making process. This occurrence was troublesome at best and life-restricting at worst. Humanity needed a solution to this life-threatening problem, which had no remedy.

Just as important to God is the disciple-making process of adults, so is the discipleship of the youth. The veracious voice of God is clear in both the Old Testament and New Testament of God's command to teach, model, instruct, and guide youth in coming into the full knowledge and grace of God. This great attention to teaching youth and forming the youth's identity in Christ was echoed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer expressed that “youth are not the future or even young members of our church communities; they are full members.”[2] For Bonhoeffer, this signaled community. Bonhoeffer is not alone in this thinking as it relates to the disciple-making process of youth. There is an African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

> Lawrence Mbogoni, an African studies professor, wrote: "Proverb or not, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child' reflects a social reality some of us who grew up in rural areas of Africa can easily relate to. As a child, my conduct was a concern of everybody, not just my parents, especially if it involved misconduct. Any adult had the right to rebuke and discipline me and would make my mischief known to my parents who in turn would also meet their own 'punishment.' The concern of course was the moral well-being of the community.[3]

In the context of New Goshen UMC, there are multiple generations that participate in ministry programming and worship; these generations include Gen Y and Gen Z. However, numerically, the Gen Y and Gen Z demographic groups have experienced a steady decrease over the last two decades, and this drop-out or falling away remains a current concern. This falling away of youth and young adults is critical to New Goshen UMC and the surrounding community for the continued life of the church and the stability of the community. This supposition is raised because the falling away of Gen Y and Gen Z is not the problem but rather a grave symptom of the problem. The problem is centered around the discipleship of Gen Z. Hence, this research explores the theology of discipleship as a theological theme of the Church (ecclesiology) to determine the necessity of developing a practical model to address the problem of leadership lacking the necessary tools and knowledge to disciple youth between the ages of thirteen to

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[2] Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 50.

[3] Joel Goldberg, “Were the African Proverbs Mentioned at the DNC Really African Proverbs?,” NPR, https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/30/487925796/it-takes-a-village-to-determine-the-origins-of-an-african-proverb.

eighteen at New Goshen UMC through the lens of systematic theology. Moreover, if the leadership at New Goshen UMC participates in a discipleship training curriculum, then they will increase the necessary knowledge and tools required to effectively disciple youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old. It is through the disciple-making process of youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen that will attract, accept, and assimilate youth into the life of the church through the forming of their Christian identity. Youth whose identity is in Jesus are more likely to remain active in their faith and remain a part of a faith community throughout their adult life.

Not only do adults desire to grow in their Christian faith through the process of learning about and following Jesus, but adolescents do as well. Generation Z finds it difficult to verbally express their understanding of God; nevertheless, this demographic longs to have their deepest needs and concerns met. Generation Z poses theological questions seeking understanding related to the existence of God, human beings, sin and evil, salvation, death and afterlife, ethics, and morality. Although the number of adolescents who do not believe in God has increased, there are many adolescents who believe in the existence of God even though they do not have a developed language to speak about God. In essence, youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen want to be ministered to.

This chapter does not present youth discipleship as a strategy for church growth. Its chief aim is to focus on the correlation between discipleship and youth following Jesus for the entirety of their lives. In The Art of Forming Young Disciples, Everett Fritz

argues that the process of discipleship forms youth into lifelong followers of Jesus through the spiritual habits developed throughout the discipleship process.[4]

Therefore, it is fitting to frame discipleship in a systematic theological context that unveils discipleship as Gregory of Nyssa does purification of the soul, which forms and shapes Christian identity. Understanding what discipleship is and the role the church must be committed to as it relates to the disciple-making process is essential to the church having a measure of success in making disciples. Gregory of Nyssa asserts that understanding the doctrine of discipleship can only come from first understanding the doctrine of God and the doctrine of salvation. Hence, this chapter will examine discipleship as a doctrine of the Church, which is undergirded by the foundational supports of the doctrines of the Creator, creation, sin, salvation, and end times. The Church cannot simply make the claim that it engages its youth in the disciple-making process without fully understanding discipleship in the realm of Christian doctrine.

Moreover, the leadership at New Goshen UMC must resist internal and external forces that seduce the church into developing and implementing ministry programming that focuses on numerical church growth at the expense of not engaging its youth in the ongoing process of forming their Christian identity-discipleship. I am not arguing that the development of the youth's Christian identity is the crux of salvation. Systematic and progressively, Christian identity loses its ambiguity and is best captured through the lens of discipleship. The formation of a person's identity in Jesus Christ is the process of discipleship. Hence, throughout this work, to provide clarity, Christian identity will be the microscopic lens through which we view and theologically unpack discipleship.

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[4] Everett Fritz, *The Art of Forming Young Disciples* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2018), 18.

Old Testament scripture highlights God as the originator and facilitator of the student-teacher, disciple-master construct, and the incarnate Jesus in the New Testament, the vehicle that provides the opportunity for humanity to acknowledge God as the Sovereign Creator, yet not created, access the presence of God, and an interactive platform to be in relationship with humanity. God uses this systematic and practical model with humanity to form and shape a head and heart, knowledge, love, and desire of the incomprehensible and transcendent God. It is through this intimate discipleship construct that humanity would develop speech which would be used to talk about God and talk to God. However, the purpose of discipleship is not for a person to know theology but to know God.

Therefore, a discussion with the theologian Medi Volpe is relevant to take a deeper dive into knowing God and the process by which an individual engages in knowing God. The relevancy is valid because she looks in the past at Gregory of Nyssa's theology regarding knowing God. Knowing God for Gregory of Nyssa required one to make a clear distinction between Creator and creation. It is only through making this distinction that a person can perceive the reality that humanity is not God; neither can humanity institute salvation for itself. It is God incarnate, Jesus Christ, through which the gift of salvation is offered. St. John's account of the gospel expresses it clearly, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:1, 14). For Gregory, Christian hope rests on this same underlying principle. The acceptance that Christian hope has no reality apart from the crystalized distinction between Creator and creation, hope becomes the

substratum of the purification of the soul, which happens within the soul through the process of salvation. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," asserts that salvation includes holiness or (purification of the soul) as a restoration of the Imago "Dei of holiness in man."[5]

This understanding of discipleship as doctrine through the lens of the doctrine of salvation and the purification of the soul provides illumination on what humanity is being saved from and what humanity is being saved for. Volpe continues to draw from Gregory of Nyssa's theology on the doctrine of God. Thus, she uses Gregory's theology as her basis to answer these two questions: what is humanity being saved from, and what is humanity being saved for? Volpe asserts that humanity is being saved from evil and saved for the new life that is being offered to be experienced via the saving work of God.[6] Thus, this process of salvation or the purification process can only be understood if correctly seen through the doctrine of God.[7]

In *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck raises the central question: "How do we think about Christian identity so that it is meaningful and specific without tying identity to a set of propositions or behaviors that remain precisely the same from one local and historical context to another?"[8] It is Rowan Williams, Kathryn Tanner, and

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[5] Darrell Stetler, "John Wesley Condensed Sermons: The Scripture Way of Salvation," New Start Discipleship, https://www.newstartdiscipleship.com/post/john-wesley-condensed-sermons-the-scripture-way-of-salvation.

[6] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

[7] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

[8] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

John Milbank who engage in theological inquiry in their critical thinking and approach to this fundamental question.

In using St. Gregory's theology as her foundation, Volpe revisits George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* and suggests that the reshaping of the imagination is the key to the transformation of the soul.[9] Thus, Christians are only considered Christian because they identify with Christ and imitate Christ. This imitation of Christ goes beyond mimicking Christ but rather requires one's participation in Christ. It is in the participation of Christ which the process of practices and beliefs of the community shape the individual life.

Kathryn Tanner, Rowan Williams, and John Milbank, these modern theologians, argue and consistently agree with each other that Christian identity is fluid pertaining to its core and boundaries yet insist that identity relies on the Christian past and cannot detach itself from it as its conversation partner.[10] Hence, Christian identity is lodged in the theology of the Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa, while simultaneously expanding on his theology of Christian identity as discipleship by listing the specifics of the shape and formation of the youth as the Christian subject being discipled. Even though Christian identity is tethered to the past, this account of Christian identity is well-suited for modern theological discourse.

Being well documented that this chapter is focused on the individual Christian identity as discipleship, I fully agree with Volpe that "the shaping of individual lives

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[9] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

[10] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

happens through the practices and beliefs of a community that carries a tradition."[11] Therefore, let us return to doctrine and acknowledge the significant part it plays not only in shaping and forming Christian identity but also in shaping imagination and directing performance. This performance of Christlikeness is expressed through developed habits of imagination and action, which makes performance possible thus becoming visible as the soul is acclimated to God's presence and reflects God's love.[12] A vital and necessary habit that is a mark of the transformed soul is hope. Hope or being hopeful is critical because it reorients desire from the world and points hope wrapped in expectancy in the direction of God. Christian identity requires holding onto hope as one converses with the past and interacts with the present. Understanding Christian identity from this perspective provides added detail and offers a path for further discussion of Christian identity.

It is Rowan Williams' description of Christian identity that focuses on the significance of taking time. Williams further asserts that we do not have a set understanding of what it means to be Christian but rather a provisional understanding which can only make sense as we comprehend what is made available through our environment.[13] In comparing Rowan Williams, Kathryn Tanner, and John Milbank's accounts of Christian identity, it is Williams who raises the notions of habits and participating in the Christian tradition through the lens of a binary theme: taking time and making sense. These themes are threaded throughout Williams' work and inevitably

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[11] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

[12] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

[13] Medi Volpe, "A 'Taking Time' and 'Making Sense:' Rowan Williams on the Habits of Theological Imagination," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 3 (2013): 345-360.

continue through the duration of his work in a three-part format. Beginning with taking time which suggests a vantage point of patient humility. Secondly, the central and foremost work of the theologian is making sense, which ultimately takes time. Lastly, it is impossible to follow Williams' theological approach without the altering of desire. For Williams, this is critical because desire describes the distinctive nature of Christian discipleship.[14]

Volpe connects the past with the present as she expands on Gregory of Nyssa's theology of Christian identity by itemizing the characteristics that shape and form a person's identity in God in the present. For this research, the postmodern subject is youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old or Gen Z. Hence, doctrine inserts itself at the core of all discourse regarding Christian identity. Why? Because doctrine provides a form for the imagination and directs the performance. It is through imagination that habits are developed, and detailed actions are what direct the performance. It is in the soul where these habits and actions begin to manifest themselves as the soul yields to the presence of God and rightly reflects the love of God. Likened unto the necessary habits of the soul of the metamorphosed caterpillar, the transformed human soul has a single necessary habit as well: hope. Hope positively positions and points desire in the direction of God. Moreover, Christian identity is tenaciously holding on to hope while one converses with their past and interacts with their present.

Advancing the argument, in conversation with Volpe, St. Gregory, Tanner, Williams, and Milbank, Christian identity is comprised of a person receiving from God the essence of their entire existence. "John Milbank presents St. Gregory as an example,

[14] Medi Volpe, "A 'Taking Time' and 'Making Sense,'" 345-360.

and in turn, St. Gregory hails his sister, Macrina, as an example."[15] Unlike Tanner and Milbank, I concur with St. Gregory's treatment of one's reception of one's existence from God as achieved in the face of struggling against sin and Williams' cycle of transformation as the primary qualifiers of actively receiving one's existence from God.

The constant change, activity, and progress that characterizes Christian discipleship is clearly demonstrated in Luke 5:1-11, the gospel narrative of Jesus' calling of Peter. Jesus had been preaching and teaching to the crowds from Simon Peter's boat. When Jesus had finished teaching, he said to Peter, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish" (Lk 5:4, NLT). Peter responded with normal Christian reason, which Volpe highlights in her research. "We worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again" (Lk 5:5, NLT). Even though the evidence of no fish being caught after toiling all night by experienced fishermen points to hanging up their nets and packing up their fishing gear, Peter is attentive to and considers Jesus' request. Notwithstanding this illogical request, there is something uniquely captivating and commanding about the person of Jesus and his teachings, which causes Peter to respond positively to this seemingly unreasonable and ridiculous request. Christian discipleship acts in conformity with its own reason and logic. Jesus' words compelled Peter to act not to the tangible evidence which was clearly present. Jesus had extended an invitation to Peter to trust him. It was Peter's positive response to Jesus' invitational request that situated Peter in a place to receive the unexpected abundance of God.

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[15] Medi Ann Volpe, "Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship," https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/book/10.1002/9781118255629.

Peter demonstrates Milbank's and St. Gregory's concept of active reception impeded by sin and Williams' process of transformation. Peter's action qualifies him for reception. Peter was the benefactor of two changes because of his experience with Jesus. In his amazement at the multitude of the catch, Peter momentarily glimpsed the Lord in the way Moses did in Exodus chapter thirty-three. Next, this never-existing radiance that he sees beaming on Jesus also beams on him, and for the first time, Peter is aware of his own spiritual brokenness and depravity. Peter's response to this experience is, "Oh, Lord, please leave me-I'm such a sinful man" (Lk. 5:8, NLT). This gospel narrative is thought provoking and begs the question if Peter's first inclination was trust as represented in his initial response to Jesus' invitation. It is my belief that, to some degree, it was then his inclination conveyed that he overcame habits that would impede him from being attentive to and considering Jesus' invitational request to "go out where it is deeper and let down your nets to catch some fish" then his response on the surface is somewhat baffling. While simultaneously unveiling the transformative cycle, which active reception or action and reception suggest progressing on the faith journey is not a one-and-done event of overcoming sin but rather overcoming sin time and time again as the light of Jesus like a heat-seeking missile penetrates the deep dark crevices of our hearts. It is the penetrating light of Christ that pulls back the dark curtains that block our reception and enable us to overcome sin.

Since overcoming sin repeatedly is part of the process of forming a Christian identity, the New Testament provides an example of this Christian formation in Acts 14:21b-22. Engaging in a detailed discussion of formation and spiritual growth in Acts chapter fourteen, Paul and Barnabas make a trip back to Iconium, Lystra, and Antioch to

provide a wellness check on the Gentiles who had been converted to Christianity in these cities. “Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21b-22, NLT). This passage of scripture carries weight as it assists in the argument that in the transformative process of Christian formation and spiritual growth, the believer needs to be constantly encouraged along their faith journey.

Whether obvious or not, the Christian formation of youth is always taking place. Our culture and society are constantly engaged in the manufacturing and production of disciples. To be clear, this discipleship, using the doctrines of society and culture to form the identity of youth, is not to have a life in Jesus but to a myriad of lifestyles apprised by cultural and societal images of fitness. This is what George Williams, founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, recognized in 1844. George Williams recognized that as young men left behind their rural lifestyles and Christian beliefs and practices to enter the large, industrialized cities seeking employment, they would be discipled by the myriad of criminal and unwholesome elements which permeated the larger industrialized cities and not Christian doctrine. They would become fit to be followers of a host of unsavory vices instead of being fit to follow Jesus.

The definition of fitness is ambiguous when attempting to define it by itself.[16] This difficulty in defining fitness by itself is the rationale behind the United States Armed

[16] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Doctrine for Disciple,” Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

Forces speaking of fitness in the context of fit for purpose.[17] Within the military setting, being fit for warfare is the purpose. Even though the military uses the holistic idea of Total Force Fitness, the central theme undergirding basic training is preparing soldiers on multiple levels to be the type of individuals who can effectively and safely accomplish their mission.[18]

It is a theology that aids the Church by serving to develop disciples who are fit for purpose. This purpose of the Christian disciple is not literally speaking, military; yet it is military. To that end, we find Solomon teaching parents and community leaders the necessity of this concept of training the youth for fitness in Proverbs 22:6. Solomon portrays discipleship in relation to fit for purpose. As recorded throughout the New Testament, Jesus portrayed discipleship in relation to fit for purpose. Luke chapter nine is steeped in discipleship; Jesus encounters three people who declare they want to become disciples. This dialogue occurs as they are walking. This is important to bring to the reader's attention since walking with a person is the main idea in discipleship. Discipleship is a summons to walk with Jesus everywhere, before everybody, and at all times. There are no idle steps or steps taken without purpose, for every step taken is part of one's walk.

Consequently, the way one walks characterizes who we are. Hence, as Jesus is walking with them, he provides them with a brief teaching on discipleship. However, it is Jesus' third teaching on discipleship that provides the most relevance for the purpose of

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[17] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[18] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

grasping doctrine as discipleship. “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God” (Lk. 9:62, NLT). To put one’s hand to the plow is to start the work of a farmer; however, looking back suggests or points to the farmer’s preoccupation with otherworldly things, which keeps the farmer from attending to the task at hand. This is critical because the presuppositional danger of the farmer looking back will yield the outcome of a crooked and off-centered row crop. When acting as messengers of the gospel and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God then are disciples of Jesus considered to be fit for purpose.[19]

“Disciples must be fit for the purpose: for godliness, for citizenship in the gospel, and for building up the church, the body of Christ.”[20] The Apostle Peter reminds us in his first missive to the Church at large of this very purpose when he proclaimed, “And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God” (1 Ptr. 2:5, NLT).[21] The Apostle Peter is not alone; he is joined by the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul had undoubtedly read Augustine of Hippo’s “The City of God” when he penned Philippians 3:20, declaring heaven as being the ultimate realm of our citizenship. To that end is the crux of discipleship: the making of disciples is the preparations of individuals to participate as citizens of the gospel of the Lord, Jesus

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[19] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Doctrine for Disciple,” Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[20] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Doctrine for Disciple,” Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[21] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Doctrine for Disciple,” Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

Christ. This was the Apostle Paul's primary aim in his contribution to the New Testament found in Philippians 1:27 and Ephesians 2:19.

Citizenship is an important concept as it relates to the doctrine of discipleship. In ancient Greece, the purpose of the gymnasium was to make its citizens and soldiers fit for the purpose of the city. For Aristotle, there were obligations attached to citizenship. He saw the obligations of citizenship to work for the good of all the city and promote a lifestyle where the demarcations in one's individual and public life were undetectable.[22] In today's culture, citizens are not merely identified as members of a city but also as members of a nation who benefit from having access to human and legal rights as well as assuming the burden of the responsibilities of that nation. Shouldering the duties for the good of the nation, such as keeping the law, is an accurate description of a good citizen. But to return to ancient Greece and Rome, citizenship was not afforded to everyone. Citizenship was reserved for those hailed elite.[23]

The title of E. D. Hirsch's book, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* asks the question: need to know for what? Hirsch's rejoinder was critical: "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."[24] Hirsch makes the argument that Americans must have a "core knowledge" of the essentials needed to function in American culture. Vanhoozer proposes employing a combination of Hirsch's and Aristotle's understanding of citizenship in making

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[22] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[23] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[24] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

application to the work of making disciples.[25] What theology aims for in reading scripture and methodically devising doctrine is for the pastor, theologian, or leader to develop able citizens of the gospel, which in its direct sense civilizes them, coming from the Latin word, Civilis relating to a citizen.[26] In essence, what is actually being sought after in theological teachings is ultimately, in a nutshell—catechesis.

The resident theologians are catechists who use a catechism to summarize and synthesize the biblical story from the doctrine of Creation trekking through to the doctrine of the end times. The purpose of the catechism is to make disciples aware of the core Christian knowledge they must possess to be effective citizens of the Kingdom of God. Simply stated, in this manner: we (the Church) teach scripture and doctrine to help disciples learn how to walk with Jesus. Make no mistake, teaching scripture and doctrine is a daunting task since it is a more rigorous discipline than all other disciplines combined, "for Christ is the culmination of God's plan and the summation of God's wisdom as the gathering place of all things in heaven and earth"[27] as Paul highlights in Ephesians 1:10. This is the theological foundation of discipleship.

Once again, it is the Apostle Peter who reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9 of the theological significance in the teaching and instructing of disciples. Disciples must learn if they are to become "fit for the purpose of the city; fit for good gospel citizenship; fit to embody the values and proclaim the excellencies of the holy nation to which they

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[25] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[26] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[27] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

belong."[28] A disciple must be responsive to the grace of God through the inward working power of the Holy Spirit in learning how to become Christ-like in nature. Thus, if teaching and instructing are of theological significance in learning Jesus Christ, it is equally important to know how the scriptures come together, hone in, and center around him.

To disciple an individual, there is the requirement of biblical interpretation, which makes biblical interpretation a type of discipleship. To learn Jesus Christ is also to learn how to read the scriptures as evidence of his person and ministry. Moreover, reading scripture includes reading it correctly; therefore, reading scripture correctly requires learning doctrine, which the Apostle Paul proclaims in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 is the treasury of apostolic tradition. Truthfully, reading scripture correctly beckons us to learn what the concept of following Jesus in our twenty-first-century context means. In this same vein, making disciples in the twenty-first century through scripture and doctrine is a way of living according to the words that point to Jesus Christ so that individuals can live a life that merits the recognition of their citizenship of the gospel.[29]

In the doctrine of Creation, humanity was created in the image of God to be vice-regents of the sovereign God and representatives of God on earth with the responsibility of the nurture and maintenance of creation. Following the Fall, "disciples were re-created in the image of the one who is the image of God, namely, Jesus Christ."[30] Therefore, it is

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[28] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[29] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

[30] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Doctrine for Disciple," Credo Magazine, https://credomag.com/2020/07/doctrine-for-discipleship/.

a requirement that Christian disciples have the attributes of their King if they are to be deemed fit for the purpose of intentionally moving God's Kingdom forward. Since representing the Kingdom of God is the purpose disciples must be fit for, proper reasoning leads one to the logical conclusion: being fit for the purpose of representing the Kingdom of God requires one to become Christ-like.

This is the theology of discipleship that New Goshen UMC leadership must grasp to disciple youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. Without rooting youth discipleship in an ecclesiological theology as being a servant who aids the Church in making disciples for the purpose of following Jesus, the work of discipleship loses its efficacy. To be intentional and committed to youth discipleship requires the church to increase its understanding of discipleship. It is through the process of discipleship that the youth develops language to speak of the attributes and character of God which reveals the restoring of their soul to the image of God.

Aiming to increase the knowledge and tools needed to effectively disciple youth will require New Goshen UMC's leadership to understand how Christian identity is formed in youths through theology being applied to the call (ecclesiology) and conduct (missiology) of the Christian Church. Otherwise, the leadership of New Goshen UMC will demonstrate glimpses of being fit for the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God but will only be able to display to the world a half-painted picture of what God looks like in the reality of the lived experience. This leaves the youth in the community surrounding New Goshen UMC and the Greater Greensboro vicinity vulnerable to becoming candidates of the discipleship process of gangs, drugs, alcohol, crime, violence, and a train of unwholesome activities at the expense of forfeiting a deep, fulfilling, loving

relationship with God. However, the embracing of discipleship as theology requires New Goshen UMC to become aware that youth are committed to learning scripture and doctrine to grow in their relationship with God as they learn to grow in Christ. The call to Christ's Church has not ceased in the work of passing down the doctrines of the Church to make disciples of future generations. As a part of Christ's Holy and living Church, New Goshen UMC must be committed to the continuance of fulfilling this call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

An in-depth examination of the church is not necessary for one to definitively conclude that even though there are churches that disciple their youth consistently and are flourishing, there are a plethora of churches that remain severely challenged by their limitations to engage in and facilitate discipleship ministry with Generation Z. Gen Z are individuals who were born between 1997 and 2012. However, there are some scholars who suggest that the age range of Gen Z is from 1997 to 2010. This scholastic sparring does not have any bearing on the focus of this chapter. The subset of Gen Z, which will be the subject of discussion, is between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old.

As emphasized by Alisha Childers, "In today's postmodern culture where relativism is the default position on truth, we need to provide an open and safe environment for young people to bring their doubts and questions to their youth pastors and church leaders."[1] Doing so will increase the church's awareness of Gen Z's worldview, how they learn, how they communicate and connect, and their deepest needs and concerns. This is an opportunity for growth that resonates as it relates to dealing with the frustration and disconnection as a youth with the previous generation of the church, a combination of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, which had been entrusted to

[1] Alisha Childers, "Creating Space for Transformative Conversations," *Gen Z: Caring for Young Souls and Cultivating Reslilence* (Barna Group and 360 Institute, 2021), 53-54.

provide youth discipleship but knew little about Gen X. It becomes clear how this disconnect between the generations presents a challenge for leadership to make a meaningful connection with youth which is necessary for discipleship. When youth lack consistent discipleship, there is a "falling away" of youth and young adults from their faith and the church. The problem is there is an outdated learning model of youth discipleship which has proven to be detrimental to the growth and existence of the church. Though leadership lacks the necessary tools and knowledge to disciple youth between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old, there is a therapeutic intervention that can reverse this malady. The prescribed remedy for this dis-ease is best administered through the model of constructivism integrated with digital technology (i.e., social media platforms, internet, apps, email, text messages, chat groups, discussion boards, videos, podcasts, live streams, and instant messages).

This model can support the church by helping it to become adaptable and flexible in addressing its inability to disciple youth. The suggestive thought embedded in this model will generate change, which, if subscribed, can elevate this declining congregation to the heights of living into the nature of its ecclesiological purpose. However, New Goshen UMC must first acknowledge that it has a problem with using outdated teaching modes to disciple youth due to failure to understand the process by which Gen Z uses to construct meaning today. Consequently, faulty teaching methods have paralyzed New Goshen UMC in discipling youth.

Moreover, faulty teaching methods have paralyzed the Church Universal and rendered her most ineffective in carrying out God's command of cultivating the next generation. Solomon shares God's heart and provides us with God's command in

Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6, ESV). To that end, the Church, shifting to a constructivist approach that will reconceptualize how youth attain, process, and synthesize information through their environment, would be beneficial in the endeavor of restoring the Church as a stalwart in American society. This interdisciplinary foundation will analyze the design of constructivism in the complexity of its details to provide additional reinforcement to the overarching hypothesis of increasing the knowledge and tools necessary to create a youth discipleship ministry.

Integrating constructivist educational approaches and digital technology into youth discipleship is best aligned with the characteristics of Gen Z to facilitate the construction of knowledge within a society that has rapidly evolved from the previous lecture-based learning environment. The constructivist learning environment is an environment that incorporates both face-to-face group interactions and interaction with social technology to drive the learning process. The transferring of knowledge from one person to another, typical of lecture-style learning, is not nearly as effective as a collaborative effort between facilitator and learner by digital technology. Face-to-face and social media interaction and engagement allow the learner to construct or increase their knowledge. These models are change agents that generate growth both in the church and small group ministries such as a youth discipleship ministry.[2]

Looking forward to the future, the most fitted of the social learning theories to address the problem is the constructivist theory. Constructivist Theory is a theory

[2] Betsy Duke, Ginger Harper, and Mark Johnston, “Connectivism as a Digital Age Learning Theory,” The International HETL Review, https://www.hetl.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HETLReview2013SpecialIssue.pdf#page=10.

developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who believed that social interaction between teacher/student and student/student was a key element of learning.[3] Constructivism is rooted in the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner. The chief aim is to communicate the information in such a way that will support each other's learning. Constructivism differs from the theory of connectivism developed by Stephen Downes. Connectivism is rooted in the fact that "knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse these networks."[4]

Gen Z is the first generation that has been born into a completely digital and technological world. Ayse Derya Isik defines technology as "the tools that human beings developed to control and change their material environment and the knowledge of all relevant things."[5] Technology is not a privilege used as a reward, a cool accessory, or even a status symbol, as with millennials. Millennials, unlike Gen Z, remember a world prior to technology even though the nascent rise of technology occurred during their early teens. For Gen Z, there is no comprehension of human existence, including learning absent technology.

Knowing that Gen Z is digital natives is not where the ship ports but rather its point of departure. Understanding Gen Z's worldview is critical to understanding how

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[3] Betsy Duke, Ginger Harper, and Mark Johnston, "Connectivism as a Digital Age Learning Theory," The International HETL Review, https://www.hetl.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HETLReview2013SpecialIssue.pdf#page=10.

[4] Betsy Duke, Ginger Harper, and Mark Johnston, "Connectivism as a Digital Age Learning Theory," The International HETL Review, https://www.hetl.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HETLReview2013SpecialIssue.pdf#page=10.

[5] Ayse Darya Isik, "Use of Technology in Constructivist Approach," Academic Journals, http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR.

Gen Z thinks and what they believe. Taking a deep dive into the Gen Z worldview will unveil the deepest needs and concerns that Gen Z is desperate to have met. Gaining an intensive insight into the worldview of Gen Z will unearth their most pressing theological questions, which beg to be answered. Being a digital native is not the only characteristic that defines the identity of Gen Z. According to research conducted by the Barna Group and the Impact 360 Institute, Gen Z is "in line with the overall trend of North American Christianity, Gen Z is identified, on the whole, as a "post-Christian" generation (only 4% profiled as fitting within Barna's definition of a 'biblical world-view)."[6] Since Gen Z are digital natives who are post-Christian, one must understand this population will require the inclusion of technology in their discipleship process.

In addition to being digital natives and post-Christian, Gen Z chooses to exercise agency in determining the outcomes of their lives. They are problem solvers and prefer a collaborative approach to problem-solving. Gen Z has a worldview of a strong body ethic and love ethic, thus adhering to the philosophical and theological views that all people should be included in the human experience without exception; channeling the Rev. John Wesley, the world is their parish. To that end, it is common to find Gen Z involved in community service activities and advocating for social justice causes. Most distinctive is their belief that truth is not absolute; therefore, any claim to understanding truth is impossible, thus lends itself to being subjective. Juxtaposing these identity descriptors of Gen Z are the identity descriptors of being prone to episodes of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses.

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[6] Joey Sherrard, "Gen Z and the Challenge of Discipleship: Retrieving the Doctrine of Creation," Academic Journals, https://academicjournals.org/ERR.

This model will benefit the church by way of helping the church pivot and providing solutions to her conundrum of providing effective teaching methods, tools, and practices and bridging the communication gap between prior generations and Gen Z amid a digital society. A teaching pedagogy using the dynamics of social constructivist educational approaches can generate change if implemented by leadership. "Social constructivism is a highly effective method of teaching that all students can benefit from, since collaboration and social interaction are incorporated."[7] Moreover, the use of social constructivist approaches can reorient a declining church where her vision is gradually restored, and once again, she sees her purpose for existing after a season of dismal darkness. This reorientation resulting from the employing of the social constructivist model will summon the church to responsiveness to the imperative mood of God, arise, and shine. "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" (Is. 60:1). Or in the words of Queen Ramonda in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," "show him who you are."[8]

Preliminary acknowledgment that the church has a grave issue in that its leadership lacks the knowledge and tools to facilitate youth discipleship effectively is essential in identifying the church's primary problem. The primary problem is pedagogical. The outdated pedagogy of the teacher lecturing, the student attentively listening, and learning assessed through testing is hamstringing the church. Moreover, this ineffective pedagogy is prohibiting the church from carrying out the church's

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[7] Katherine C. Powell and Cody J. Kalina, "Cognitive And Social Constructivism: Developing Tools For An Effective Classroom," Florida Atlantic University, https://docdrop.org/static/drop-pdf/Powell-and-Kalina-U6g4p.pdf.

[8] *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, directed by Ryan Koogler (Marvel Studios/Disney, 2022). This is a quote from the character Queen Ramonda played by actress Angela Bassett.

mandate of discipling youth. King Solomon gives Israel God's divine word in Proverbs 22:6 as he warns the parents and leaders of the consequences of not providing discipleship to their youth. "Train up a child in the way he should go [teaching him to seek God's wisdom and will for his abilities and talents], Even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Pro. 22:6, AMP).

Attempting to facilitate change in how leadership disciple youth is a daunting task for even the experienced leader. Shifting an organization's philosophy and practices will provide a plentitude of obstacles and opposition to challenge the facilitator(s). Richard S. Ascough and Charles A. Cotton assert that "It is not easy being caught up in a major transformational era; anyone who has tried to change mindsets in an organizational culture, or make a merger work seamlessly know that."[9] Hence, implementing a social constructivist approach to youth discipleship infused with social networking to reimagine the origins of how youth gain knowledge and communicate will benefit the church as it endeavors to be a healthy, relevant, and growing entity in this twenty-first-century secular society.

Mike McGarry, author of the book Lead Them To Jesus: A Handbook For Youth Workers, states that "the goal of youth ministry is not to build teenage disciples, but adult disciples whose faith took root in their teen years,"[10] McGarry continues to talk about what is discipleship and how church leadership must avoid confining youth discipleship to classroom teaching. He likens youth discipleship to that of a craftsman's workshop

[9] Richard S. Ascough and Charles A. Cotton, *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 26.

[10] McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus: A Handbook for Youth Workers*, 106.

where the master craftsman trains the young novice; making discipleship "embodied teaching, not simply a transfer of information."[11] Thus, this chapter on interdisciplinary foundation will analyze social constructivist educational approaches and social networking dynamics as a theoretical model of embodied teaching that goes beyond simply transferring information in order to support the overarching hypothesis of increasing leadership's effectiveness in discipling youth to strengthen the church.

Dewey's Pragmatic Form of Social Constructivism

An increasing number of theorists in academia are using social constructivism synonymously with collaborative learning due to collaborative learning possessing a constructivist epistemology.[12] One of those educators and philosophers who was seen as a social constructivist was John Dewey. Dewey established a pragmatic method for the theory of knowledge. For Dewey, the process of learning is not achieved in isolation, but rather, learning takes place when the learner is connected with their immediate community and the world around them. This suggests a "triangular relationship for the social construction of ideas among the individual, the community and the world."[13]

Without exception, Dewey's espoused beliefs are that ideas have significant meaning when they can be classified among an approved and agreed-upon theory, have an important influence in generating positive outcomes, are developed by shareholders

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[11] McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus: A Handbook for Youth Workers*, 106.

[12] Rebecca L. Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands in the Language Classroom," *The Modern Language Journal* 81, no. 4 (1997): 443–56. https://doi.org/10.2307/328888.

[13] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-56.

within the community, and are connected to the signals or pointers established by the community at large. From Dewey's vantage point, "disciplined, reflective inquiry promoted by a community of learners (i.e., knowledge community) helps create meaning among seemingly unstable events."[14]

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Ideas

Lev Vygotsky made notable contributions to social constructivist epistemology. Vygotsky, like Dewey, realized that ideas have their roots in social origins. They both agree that it is through communicating with others that ideas are formed. "An individual's cognitive system is a result of communication in social groups and cannot be separated from social life."[15] Likewise, Vygotsky's and Dewey's emphasis and attention are on the necessity of the learner being wedded to the group context. Vygotsky argues that the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator and provides assistance. Why does Vygotsky make this assertion? In the article, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands in The Language Classroom," Rebecca Oxford suggests that for Vygotsky, the teacher has the most to contribute when aiding however needed to be an impetus force in the learner's development.[16] The teacher provides assistance in any area at any time needed. The concept of scaffolding is assistance provided by the teacher where the learner has the most need. Scaffolding provides the learner with the necessary assistance in the early stages of constructing

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[14] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-456.

[15] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-456.

[16] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-456.

knowledge. Scaffolding supports the dynamics of social constructivist theory in that the learner remains an active participant in the learning process. As the learner's knowledge grows, the teacher removes the scaffolding, which acts as a support, and the learner becomes progressively self-guided through the exercise of agency.

Vygotsky institutes the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is "the realm of potential learning that each learner could reach within a given developmental span under optimal circumstances and with the best possible support from the teacher and others in the environment."[17] This realm of space is not fixed, but rather, it is negotiable between teacher and learner, learner and peers, and/or learner and others.

The education system, which gauged society's strength, produced a behavioral structure founded on output using preexisting knowledge. Likened to a mentor-mentee relationship, the education system concentrated on the attainment of available information and using tools. Throughout the period when this behaviorist model was in use, individuals' behavior was modified and analyzed. The tools and activities used in the education setting were structured to achieve behavior change.[18]

Future scientific and technological discoveries opened the door to experience modifications in social structures. No longer was the educational system at the center of power. The education system had been usurped by information. The gauge of society's strength now rested on information. Converting and constructing information would rise

[17] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-456.

[18] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands In The Language Classroom," 443-456.

to the top as the principal values. This shift, which placed converting and constructing information on center stage, was also the catalyst of the swift increase in existing information. As a result, an individual's learning capacity increases with the accessibility of such voluminous amounts of information. Moreover, the general idea of learning changed. Even though possessing knowledge in multiple disciplines was deemed significant for years, it was not without the understanding that the possession of knowledge in multiple disciplines was not an assurance that an individual comprehended the content of the subject. In this transformative time when cognitive processes such as converting and constructing information had heightened, the use of a behaviorist model, which focused on human behavior as the key indicator, would not produce expected outcomes. Hence, before the structure of the education system changed, there, first was a change in the philosophy of education.

Ayse Isik agrees with David Perkins's article, "Smart Schools: From Training Memories to Education Minds," that education is understood to be the goal in the active use of knowledge and skills. Isik continues, "In addition, it is believed that an educational philosophy, that is, the constructivist approach, which focuses on the mind of people, with the aim to improve cognitive skills, claims that information is formed as a result of one's interaction with his environment."[19] Constructivism is an educational approach that continues to be well-suited to foster learning in this digital age.

Thus, according to Ayse Isik, "constructivism is an approach that takes a role in developing instruction methods based on the construction of knowledge by an individual,

[19] Ayse Darya Isik, "Use of Technology in Constructivist Approach," Academic Journal, http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR.

based on his/her prior knowledge, skills and competencies."[20] Out of the need for education to be both productive and enduring, along with the ability to repurpose pre-existent instructional approaches, came constructivism. The idea behind constructivism is that an individual learns as they are actively engaged, and learning becomes a construct of one's own thinking. Ayse Isik uses Turgut et al summary of the primary tenants of constructivism. They are:

> 1) Information is appropriated to the mind and called assimilation; information perceived does not conflict with the existing prior knowledge of the individual and is incorporated in existing categories in one's mind.
> 2) It creates an imbalance in mind if the perceived information does not fit any categories in mind. In order to incorporate this imbalance, learners use a set of cognitive processes. Moreover, this restructuring is called self-adjustment. The process of incorporating imbalance is affected by one's prior knowledge and cognitive skills. If one of these falls short, self-adjustment process fails and unaccommodated behaviors of the individual continues to exist.
> 3) People can experience the imbalance without receiving information from the external world and by asking questions themselves. In such as case, such creativities, as producing original information and finding an original method, are formed.[21]

Recent Social Constructivist Contributions

Continued research in constructivism has benefited the field of education by introducing new concepts such as context and situated cognition. The context (i.e., setting and activity) in which knowledge is developed cannot be separated from learning, nor is it neutral.[22] Lave, Wenger, and Rogoff are correct in their argument that it is within the

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[20] Ayse Darya Isik, "Use of Technology in Constructivist Approach," Academic Journals, http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR.

[21] Ayse Darya Isik, "Use of Technology in Constructivist Approach," Academic Journals, http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR.

[22] Oxford, "Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction," 443-456.

contextual situated boundaries in which the process of learning occurs. Learning takes place when individuals are interactive and engaged in the social aspects of their culture. Moreover, this social engagement reconstructs the individual's perspective and obligations as a participating member. The individual begins to construct knowledge through myriad social interactions that reframe the rules of community engagement.

The Use of Technology as a Constructivist Approach

These social interactions, which redefine the rules in how youth within a community connect and learn from each other, are critical. Therefore, the church should not dismiss the use of digital technology as a constructive tool of social interaction as a way to increase knowledge and interact with an approach related to effective youth discipleship. As COVID-19 taught church leaders, if the church were to be effective in proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ, it would be imperative that the church leave the building. The gospel had to be taken to where the people were. For the first time in the modern history of America, the church was empty. Worship services, Bible study, Sunday school, youth ministry, and pastoral care were carried out via social media platforms. The same should hold true for youth discipleship.

Many of the youth between thirteen to eighteen years old may never enter the physical space of the church. Notwithstanding physical attendance, the church still has the high and noble call of improving the moral and spiritual well-being of youth so that they will be fit for the purpose of following Jesus. Therefore, if the church is going to be effective in cultivating the next generation through youth discipleship, then the church must be adaptable and flexible in embracing the use of digital technology to disciple

youth in the environment in which they are natives—digital technology. In the book *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, Nona Jones emphasizes how the church should not view digital technology as the enemy of the church but rather as a strategic tool for advancing the Kingdom of God.[23]

It is important for the church to understand if it is to increase its knowledge and tools necessary to disciple Gen Z then a model of learning which is integrated with digital technology will not be non-negotiable. The use of digital technology, which extends beyond merely reaching but incorporates teaching/learning that is relevant to the life of the youth, is most effective in the youth making the decision to participate in a youth discipleship ministry. Jodi G. Hunt presents in her article, "The Digital Way: Reimaging Digital Discipleship in the Age of Social Media," that youth discipleship ministry has "missed opportunities to fully develop youth and young adults into faithful and faith-filled digital disciples."[24] If youth are to become digital disciples, it is essential that those who lead youth ministries first acknowledge the important function that digital technology plays in the life of youth.

Once youth leaders have recognized the significant function of digital technology in the life of youth, then leadership can focus on the role of technology in youth discipleship. In examining the role of technology in youth discipleship, one should be aware that there are both opportunities and challenges involved in using technology for discipleship. First, exploring the opportunities of using digital technology as a constructive approach in discipling youth turns our attention to unlimited access to

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[23] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 4.

[24] Hunt, *The Digital Way,* 91-112.

information. Digital technology offers youth discipleship a significant opportunity by allowing individual accessibility to a bulk of information and resources with relative ease. Using existing digital platforms that most people, including youth, interact with daily, such as websites, search engines, apps, and social media, individuals have access to a myriad of biblical resources, such as various Bible translations, commentaries, and Bible study resources. Easy accessibility of resources is significant because it increases the individual's knowledge, which is necessary for proper life application. This increase in biblical and cultural knowledge and application of information is a result of the individual being able to study scripture in depth, explore theological concepts such as sin, evil, love, and justice, and interact with faith-based materials using digital technology.

Next, there are individualized and interactive learning opportunities in using digital technology as a constructive approach to youth discipleship. Since everyone's learning style is uniquely different, a one-size-fits-all approach to youth discipleship is counterproductive. However, there are multiple online platforms that offer an array of multimedia formats that the individual can best pair with their learning preferences, such as videos, podcasts, and guided /tutorial interactive lessons. By being flexible in the delivery of content, digital technology creates a robust and interactive means of engaging individuals. Thus, the flexibility in the delivery of content promotes a greater understanding of biblical literature and greater proficiency in practical application. Finally, the online elements of the assessment process and the criteria for performance can aid individuals in spiritual development as well as monitor their degree of progress in the disciple-making process. Online assessment tools allow the youth to monitor their

progress in real-time, which provides greater insight for the youth and the youth leader in making necessary modifications for an optimal learning experience.[25]

Another opportunity in using digital technology as constructivism is the ability for the individual to connect with other people. It is through digital technology that individuals can make connections and ultimately build relationships with other followers of Christ. This digital connection is not limited to the individual's immediate environment. Relationship building with other Christians can take place globally as well. Global connections promote the idea of a global community of faith or a global family. Believers are no longer individual entities but rather become one connected body through its many members. This is the unified body of Christ, which the Apostle Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NLT),

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but many (1 Cor. 12:12-14).

Digital technology offers opportunities for dialogue, sharing thoughts and ideas, and supporting fellow believers in their discipleship journey. Using digital technology, such as social media, online gatherings, and videoconferencing, supports one's spiritual formation. Connecting with others globally is significant in the constructivist approach, as global connectivity creates various vantage points, fosters cross-cultural sensibilities, and develops a circle of friends for those who feel isolated or limited in their physical environment.

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[25] Hunt, *The Digital Way,* 91-112.

If the church is to change direction in its approach to teaching youth and its approach to how youth learn out of the necessity to carry out an effective youth discipleship ministry, leadership must understand the role of digital technology through the lens of engagement and relevant teaching. Digital systems and resources present innovative and creative ways to present teaching resources in a visually inviting and captivating manner. Digital technology such as videos, animation, and interactive graphics can invite the attention of youth. The use of such digital technologies aids the learning process as they are impactful and add enjoyment to the process of learning. Digital technology allows teachers to disseminate contextual, time-sensitive, and relevant information as it dialogues with current ethical, biblical, and secular concerns, as well as issues that will confront future generations. This forges an opportunity for the teacher to share biblical principles as a response to real-life challenges.

There is flexibility and convenience in using digital technology as a constructive approach to youth discipleship. Using digital technology to access discipleship materials and resources is flexible and convenient for the user. Such digital technologies as online platforms and mobile apps allow individuals to manage their spiritual growth at their own pace, time, and location. Flexibility and convenience are essential when considering an individual's busy schedules, travel requirements, and personal desires. The flexibility of digital technology creates an added degree of convenience for the user. The use of digital technology increases the accessibility and inclusivity of discipleship to a larger demographic of individuals.

When there is a myriad of opportunities available there also comes with it a myriad of challenges and responsibilities. This is no less true in highlighting the

opportunities associated with engaging digital technology as a constructive approach to learning. In this domain, there are also a myriad of challenges and responsibilities present in the learning environment, which teachers and learners must become aware of to mitigate the potential risk and harm the learner may be exposed to using digital technology. The challenges include paralysis by excessive amounts of information, superficial interaction and disruptions, feeling disconnected, technological obstacles, and privacy and safety protection.

The use of digital technology integrated into discipleship as a constructive approach to learning offers great possibilities to connect with and teach the next generation. Notwithstanding the unlimited opportunities and promises offered in using digital technology, there are still challenges and potential harm to consider. With a greater understanding of the vast possibilities digital technology offers, one can assess risk and mitigate the challenges with greater insight and clarity. This proactive approach to risk management and mitigation allows the individual to remain focused on biblical principles, person-centered discipleship, and an organic development of community relationships. When digital technology is used in the learning environment within the scope of its intended purposes and ethically, it has the potential of presenting itself as an impactful resource for supporting and strengthening the individual on their spiritual journey.

One of the primary assumptions that are made in this project is that through a well-developed youth discipleship training curriculum, the model of constructivism and digital technology will produce skilled and knowledgeable leaders who can implement a youth discipleship ministry. The process of developing a constructivist and digital

technology approach for a youth discipleship training curriculum to implement a youth discipleship ministry will catapult the church forward in its youth discipleship endeavors. The church is poised to pass the gospel to the next generation so that they may become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Equipping the leadership of the church with knowledge and tools embedded in this constructivist and digital technology model will promote effective youth discipleship. Having the ability to engage youth through constructivist and digital technology methods is important in engaging the church's current youth as well as youth in the community. Implementing this model is critical to the church experiencing healthy and natural growth. The constructivist and digital technology model will provide the opportunity for both in-person and virtual learning opportunities. Equipping the church's leadership with knowledge and tools for effective youth discipleship will help the church recognize how youth between thirteen to eighteen years old view the church. Hence, when the church implements a youth discipleship ministry program, the church will have insight into the worldview of this target group. Vo Huong Nam states, "Practically, digital media, with its positive and negative influences, shapes youth in distinctive ways, and thus, in acknowledging both, we can provide both acceptance and approval of their world while providing the necessary teachings and guidance to help youth better navigate life in the digital age."[26]

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[26] Vo Huong Nam, *Digital Media Youth Discipleship* (Carlisle, CA: Langham Academics, 2023), 36, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=_QnJEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT9&dq=social+media+and+youth+discipleship&ots=nUQEkJZIDb&sig=fARVlNHEi57nieN3uaPPAnqde1Y#v=onepage&q=social%20media%20and%20youth%20discipleship&f=false.

This project assumes that the existing church leadership is in a spiritual and physical state of condition where they need a constructivist and digital technology model. This model is needed to increase the knowledge and tools of leadership to implement a youth discipleship ministry that uses social media, mobile apps, and online platforms. This is a collaborative model in which the youth learn through their environment and interact with digital technology with guided assistance from the teacher. This constructivist model fosters discipleship. I agree with Nona Jones, who defines discipleship as "the process of coming alongside people in an intentional way to enable them to grow and mature in their faith."[27]

With the shift in society to an age of digital technology and Gen Z, also referred to as digital natives, being born into this digital age, the church must make the shift into a digital society if it is to be successful at passing the gospel to future generations. It is not effective for the church to wait for youth to come to the church to participate in a formation they are not aware they are in need of. Nona Jones argues that the church should not wait for people to find it, but the church should go out and find people.[28] Additionally, Phil Bowdle states, "The average person who attends your church may only physically attend eight to ten times a year. The average person your church is trying to communicate with is on social media 116 minutes a day."[29] This is a clear indicator that the church must meet youth where they are in digital platforms. The approach of this project is grounded in scripture and other resources that speak to how to effectively

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[27] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 131.

[28] Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry*, 18.

[29] Phil Bowdle, *Rethink Communication*, 41.

disciple youth. The project will use the insights of biblically and theologically sound practitioners of the Christian faith which will aid in informing the project in the areas of youth discipleship and the use of digital technology. More and more people are making social connections on social media and digital platforms than ever before, and this trend will not reverse. If the church is to pass the gospel to the next generation, it is imperative that she enters the digital natives' world to offer Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

It is a universal reality that passion and proficiency are twin flames that belong together. However, it is not uncommon to find a person or group of people who possess a passion for a specific thing but lack the understanding of the process and the proficiency to execute it. Where there is passion without process and proficiency, it can have a pernicious effect on an organization or institution.

The one thing that is obvious and inspiring when spending any amount of time at New Goshen UMC is their heart and hunger for ministry. Individuals who decide to participate in the life of New Goshen UMC are assigned to a family ministry group. New members must participate in the new member orientation classes for four weeks. Throughout the new member orientation process, new members learn Wesleyan doctrine, history, mission, vision of the church, and how to participate and serve in the church's various ministries. To ensure members participate and serve in ministries that best align with their core values and desires, new and existing members participate in a battery of spiritual gifts assessment. New members complete a spiritual gifts assessment during new member orientation, while existing members complete a spiritual gifts assessment every three years. Through the new membership process and intercessory prayer, the Holy Spirit directs members into ministry to promote their spiritual growth and strengthen the church.

Accuracy is the hallmark of this spiritual gifts assessment and is noteworthy to highlight. The accuracy of members who are serving in ministries that their spiritual gifts assessment highlighted as having a penchant towards is phenomenal. The parallels between the distinct variables of accuracy and passion highly align. Hence, members who are placed accurately in ministry based on the results of their spiritual gifts assessment are also incredibly passionate about doing the sacred work of ministry and view the ministry as their divine life-calling. Members are not soft-spoken or bashful when verbally expressing how passionate they are about the ministries in the church they are called to serve by God. They demonstrate their passion by consistently showing up for ministry. Their passion is the driving force that causes them to show up even when it is inconvenient for them and their families. The members give of their time to serve the church and community without reservation. The members also demonstrate their passion for doing the sacred work of ministry by sowing financially and in kind to advance the vision and ensure a legacy for New Goshen UMC. The bountiful resources of the church are a truthful testament to the provision of God through the members' gracious and generous giving. The members' passion can be witnessed in sharing their gifts with the church and for the common good of humanity. It is through the passionate sharing of their gifts and graces that some of the community's deepest needs and pressing concerns are attended to. It is out of the sharing of these gifts and graces that the church bears the resemblance of Jesus Christ.

Albeit powerful, passion was never designed to be a one-legged animal. Though the passion for ministry at New Goshen UMC is inspiring, it is still one-legged. Thus, passion alone is incapable of producing desired ministry outcomes. The presence and

willingness of passionate members can often lead to discouragement, discontentment, and despair when there is an absence of potential. Passion and potential were never meant to be separated. When they do not coexist, the church is left with poorly executed ministry strategies and a failure to fully live into the biblical call to care for church, community, and creation. The espoused vision of New Goshen UMC's senior pastor and leadership is to assess the membership's passion and potential gifts for serving in a particular ministry before requesting them to lead that ministry. Just like anything else, there are strengths and weaknesses within the membership, and using the spiritual gifts assessment tool is an area where there is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses among the membership. When there is the availability of members who are knowledgeable and experienced with using the spiritual gifts assessment tool, they are employed to administer the assessment of the members. However, there are members who are not knowledgeable and experienced with using the spiritual gifts assessment tool. In these instances, New Goshen UMC has looked beyond its congregation to its missional connection with the Northern Piedmont district churches to seek resources and assistance to ensure the passion and potential of identified leaders are properly assessed for areas of leading ministry.

When this process of assessing a member's passion and potential for leading a ministry is carried out, it has proven to return a high yield in the areas of presence and participation. However, when this process of assessing a member's passion and potential for leading a ministry has not been implemented, it has proven to return a low yield in the areas of presence and participation, leaving the ministry to suffer and, in some instances, dissolve. This low yield in the areas of presence and participation is seemingly the apprehension of members not wanting to serve in leadership positions where they are not

spiritually gifted or inclined. As a result, it is critical to the life of New Goshen UMC to make certain each member's spiritual gifts are properly assessed for passion and potential to marry with the appropriate ministry for leadership.

While passion and potential are crucial in assessing leadership suitability, they do not have the power to sustain long-term ministry goals. This is the current reality of New Goshen UMC. Leaders have been matched with ministries they have shown passion and potential for, yet ministry outcomes continue to wane. There is constant turnover among ministry leaders, high attrition, and low engagement among ministry participants. Thus, we can dive deeper into this thought by carefully pushing the envelope. Passion and potential are the bookends of preparation and proficiency but are simply insufficient as independent variables. It is vitally important that passion and potential are interconnected with the preparation and process for a ministry leader to reach the point of proficiency. This has been the simple, central theme of this project. Exploring the worldview of digital natives between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, coupled with how they learn and interact with others, and lasering in on the shift from previous generations. This generational shift has made training the leadership of New Goshen UMC in how to disciple teenage youth of the utmost importance.

Re-entering the church on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic with a new hybrid platform of in-person and virtual ministry and pursuing theological education at United Theological Seminary revealed the training that New Goshen UMC critically needed. The consistent imperative mood of scripture regarding church leaders training youth in every generation in the love, truth, and knowledge of God was the catalyst that fueled the move from a state of inertia. On the other hand, New Goshen UMC wanted

youth to engage and respond like the youth of generations past. This is only wishful thinking and cannot happen because of the transformation in how youth view the relevance of Christian life, the advancement of and access to digital technology, and social media platforms. New Goshen UMC does not have the freedom to omit a segment of the population from discipleship ministry, which makes up twenty-seven percent of the U.S. population.[1] The necessity to provide all New Goshen UMC leaders with the necessary knowledge and tools to disciple youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen became vitally urgent. However, the focus was on members who were currently leading youth discipleship ministry and members who demonstrated passion and potential to lead in youth discipleship ministry.

Methodology

The chief aim of this body of work is to demonstrate that if youth leaders at New Goshen UMC participated in a focus group to increase their understanding of how to best engage and teach youth to develop the character and nature of Jesus Christ, they would gain increased knowledge and tools necessary to disciple youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. Consequently, it would increase the presence and participation of youth in all areas of the life of New Goshen UMC. Since youth follow and socialize with other youth, this would highlight New Goshen UMC as being a more progressive and appealing space for youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen in the community.

[1] Sojourners, "1 Million Leaving the Church Every Year," Sojo.net, https://sojo.net/articles/sponsored/1-million-leaving-church-every-year-gen-z-faithless-generation#:~:text=However%2C%20a%20consistent%20theme%20is,that%20Christ%20desires%20for%20them.

Qualitative data is necessary for the methodology of this research at New Goshen UMC. Since leaders at New Goshen UMC are expected to comprehend the significance of Gen Z's character traits to facilitate the ongoing process of youth discipleship for this demographic, it is equally important that I gather the defining character traits of this focus group, which is comprised primarily of Baby Boomers (1946-1964). The leaders' traits would need to be gathered from each individual and as a group. The primary benefit of using this qualitative approach is it captures the frequency. Numbers provide information but rarely provide an explanation. Hence, it is critical to get behind the statistical data to clarify any noticeable patterns and address those noticeable patterns to the degree that the leadership of New Goshen UMC can grasp this distinctive trend.

Knowing that if the data was to have integrity, it had to go beyond the boundaries of being solely qualitative. Therefore, it was important that the data also be empirical data. This was accomplished by allowing the leaders to remain in their natural environment. By using this methodology, I was able to observe the leaders' verbal responses and non-verbal body language without any outside influences. This methodology proved beneficial as it created space to interact with the leaders in the predominant fashion that they were currently using to interact with each other and with the membership of New Goshen UMC, which is in person. Since the technique of how the leaders usually interact with each other and the members of New Goshen UMC remained the same, it led to reliable and forthright responses to the guided questions they were presented with. This acknowledgment is critical because their responses to these guided questions ultimately provide the data for this research study. The focus group was not encouraged to engage in unprompted responses in their natural environment.

Likewise, spontaneous methods were not employed in the youth discipleship training, which would modify the leader's present involvement. The avoidance of using a spontaneous method was to ensure the most reliable insight was exercised to best prepare these leaders.

To push further, a more encompassing look at the research method underscores participant observation. This entails observational data, which involves participant observation. Serving as a Visiting Pastor for a one-year term allowed me to make a significant contribution to data development. Continuing the continuity with the narrative voice the leadership was currently in a relationship with and accustomed to was critical as New Goshen UMC endeavored to engage in more complex strategies of youth discipleship with increased frequency. Being that New Goshen UMC was challenged with making meaningful contact with youth and recently, within the past year, began to coalesce as one body around their need to establish a youth discipleship ministry. Many leaders are still becoming acclimated to this concept of youth engagement; thus, it became fundamental to the research not to change the persona of the trainer for a youth discipleship ministry.

Like all research methods, participant observation has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of utilizing participant observation start with having a thorough knowledge of the context. I have served as the Visiting Pastor at New Goshen UMC for a year. In addition to serving as the Visiting Pastor, I have shared in worship, community outreach, fellowship, and evangelism experiences for the past twenty years with New Goshen UMC, thus making this a context with which I am intimately acquainted and deeply versed. Personal relationships have been forged with all members.

Because I have deep insight into the history of New Goshen UMC and personal bonds with the individuals who chose to participate in the research study, it was advantageous to gather the data necessary to assess how best to prepare leaders for youth discipleship. Second, it is advantageous because I am privy to the membership and participant's past and present commitment and dedication to ministries at New Goshen UMC. Pushing the leaders to commit beyond what they are willing to take action to fulfill would have been a detriment to the outcome of the collected data.

Just as there are advantages, there are also disadvantages to using participant observation. My focus was to avoid my biases, such as my progressive belief in full inclusivity of all people and that youth have human agency to influence the development of the surveys and questionnaires. Striving to ensure these biases did not influence the data collection, I allowed peers to assist in surveys and questionnaire development. Another disadvantage that is important to capture is the environment. The participants were aware that they were being observed; I did not want them to alter their natural behavior to provide a socially acceptable response, thus generating skewed data collection. To mitigate this bias, I intentionally observed participants without their knowledge to minimize their sensibilities and responsiveness to being observed. The goal was to not engage the focus group or an individual participant in discussions that would cause the participants to modify their normal behavior or responses regarding engaging with youth between thirteen and eighteen years old. To put this forward, we allowed the environment to remain in its normal state as we use the space monthly for ministry. Adequate time was allocated to advising each participant on how our time together would be accurately recorded and stewarded to garner the required qualitative

data for this research study. To prohibit the disruption of authentic discussions and responses, the use of uncommon practices was not employed for data collection or to carry out focus group meetings, since such data will be incorporated into the data that will be analyzed.

The data collected was from a six-person focus group from New Goshen UMC. Everyone is a full professing member who is active in the life of New Goshen UMC and leads in ministry. Including ministry leaders who have witnessed the ebb and flow of ministry over a large segment of the church's history was important. In addition to witnessing the changes and shifts in the church's ministries, these individuals also participated in the various shifts that have taken place in the church. Therefore, this created a synergy among the participants due to an atmosphere of existing relationships and familiarity. However, equally important was to include members who have not witnessed or participated in the various shifts over the decades in the ministries at New Goshen UMC. Above all, I was assured these individuals would not be transitioning to serve in other areas of ministry leadership through the process of the church's nomination committee or of their own volition. This six-person group consented to gather every Saturday to participate in the training for a six-week period, beginning September 14, 2024, to October 19, 2024.

This focus group gathered in person from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. each Saturday. Each gathering was held in the fellowship hall of New Goshen UMC. The fellowship hall was collectively identified as the most appropriate location as it allowed for adequate space and privacy for transparent discussions. I provided drinks, light refreshments, and breakfast sandwiches for the group at each of the Saturday sessions. The training space

was arranged with rectangular tables fashioned in a U-shape with my table at the head. This configuration allowed for a feeling of community as opposed to arranging the tables lengthwise of the room, presenting a feel of Bible study or a conference setting. I advised the focus group that the training sessions would not be recorded; however, I would be taking notes of their responses and behaviors during the training. Each gathering commenced and concluded with prayer, including a ten-minute break in sessions two through six. Each participant was able to remain for the duration of each ninety-minute training session.

The first gathering consisted of individual introductions. Since each member already knew the other, an additional segment of the introductions used as an ice breaker included sharing an unknown fun fact about themselves. In addition to individual introductions, the participants were provided with an outline of the nature and purpose of the project. I explained the purpose of journaling. I called to the participant's attention that the next five weeks would be a spiritual journey we would enter with each other powered by the Holy Spirit as we dived into scripture. I further emphasized to the group that we would closely examine a passage of scripture that was familiar and relevant to the group discussion on youth discipleship and how each generation's worldview contributed to the discussion. Identifying the various generations by birth years and how each generation's core values shaped their thinking and behavior on youth discipleship was necessary for them to see. I presented them with a pre-survey to complete, along with a journaling notebook. I informed the participants to journal honestly and not alter their responses because I would be reading their reflections. The participants were informed that I would collect their journals at the conclusion of our week six training session.

Training sessions two through six commenced and concluded with prayer and included a ten-minute break. Participants' commitment to participate was punctuated by each member attending each weekly training session and remaining for the ninety-minute duration.

Upon collecting the data, the transcripts of this data were analyzed by reading the transcripts multiple times. The transcripts were translated from the written field notes, capturing observable key points of the participants' behaviors, discussions, and interactions with each other during the six-week observation period since the training sessions were not recorded. To press further in gaining the most reliable interpretation of the data, multiple vantage points were obtained for each experience. The data was triangulated in the spirit of achieving a rich portrait of the focus group. Triangulation provided a myriad of viewpoints. Triangulation is important as it provides a means to substantiate the data and ensure depth and breadth to the analysis process. A set of transcripts from each training session was gathered, thus creating six unique collections of data to be analyzed. Each collection of data was a minimum of one page from each training session. Two sets of each transcript were printed. This collection of transcripts had to be further organized for analysis.

An in-depth analysis was conducted to identify the formation of patterns and the lack thereof across the six sets of transcripts generated by using an inductive approach of open-ended questions. Analyzing the data in this manner allowed for uncovering underlying concepts and the development of these concepts as they emerged during the group experience. Initial color coding was used to identify patterns and key concepts in the data. This gave me a sense of efficiency as I could spot repetition in similar patterns,

thus aiding in recognizing connections by their segmented color. The second set of transcripts were also analyzed. The data of the second set of transcripts were analyzed in the same manner as the first; however, this time, the differences that were repetitive were color-coded using a different color than the similarities. It is important to highlight that the use of this color-coding analysis was done to avoid mistakenly conflating the data. It was important to me to mitigate the risk of inaccurate interpretation of the data. Even though copying and pasting the transcript data was acceptable, it presented a greater risk of combining data that needed to remain distinct to lead to the most accurate analysis.

Implementation

The project outcomes produced deliverables from a pre-survey administered to each focus group participant at New Goshen UMC. This experience proved useful to the participants and to the research data gathered. The purpose of the pre-survey was to establish that each participant was aware of how they were to engage in the focus group. The pre-survey allowed me to gauge their level of understanding. The pre-survey provided the participants with a greater level of comfort with the terminology and concepts that would be introduced throughout the training sessions. Having some understanding of what the participants may have been thinking or feeling regarding being instructed with the expectation to instruct other members of the church was important to the research. The data collected from administering the pre-survey shed light on the group's thoughts. If the pre-survey had been omitted, then the participants may not have had the necessary knowledge or details to be pliable throughout the focus group training

sessions. As a result of administering the pre-survey, the participants' time spent in the focus group was deemed fruitful.

After all the participants finished the pre-survey, I felt it was germane to our time together to explain the purpose and essence of these six focus group sessions. This was underscored in Focus Group Session One. First things first, it was imperative to communicate with the focus group that each training session was theologically grounded and rooted in scripture. I shared with the focus group that all the training sessions had spiritual significance and embodied sacred value. Helping the focus group understand why these types of training sessions were necessary and beneficial to the Kingdom of God and New Goshen UMC was critical. It was of the utmost importance that they understood training sessions such as this fulfill the church's ecclesiological reasoning of existing as well as inform the missiological work that the church is biblically mandated to carry out. Being fully aware of and deeply immersed in the context of this focus group provided me with the insight that these focus group training sessions could not be merely academic or educational; rather, they had to incorporate a spiritual component.

New Goshen UMC is acclimated to facilitating and participating in meetings using a format of responding to probing and prompting questions. Therefore, to maintain conformity, the same format was used for each training session. Sermonizing the participants with the purpose of persuading them of the significance of engaging in youth discipleship or manipulating New Goshen UMC members to engage in youth discipleship was not my aim. The chief aim of the time engaged in each focus group training session was to give background, highlight details, and share relevant information that would increase their knowledge and tools to engage in the praxis of youth discipleship and, in

turn, train other leaders in New Goshen UMC. This format of using probing and prompting questions lead to organic discussions among the focus group participants. Being able for the focus group participants to engage in organic communication provided opportunities for the participants to learn about youth discipleship and each other. This open and organic style of discussion among the participants was instrumental in collecting the necessary data for this research.

In addition to reevaluating the participants' spiritual viewpoints, the questions asked served the additional purpose of providing me with their degree of understanding and mastery as I endeavored to equip them to equip others in the ministry of youth discipleship. The group readily shared their experience and familiarity in engaging and affirming youth in a church, social, or professional setting. The group welcomed the opportunity to gain new tools and knowledge related to youth discipleship. I shared with the group the importance of engaging youth in a way that is affirming and meaningful to them. Emphasizing that acknowledging what is affirming and meaningful builds trust and rapport with youth, which is at the core of the youth discipleship process.

Astutely aware that the data collected from the focus group is the substratum of this research project, I advised each participant that their responses would be used for academic purposes. They were also informed that each training session would take place in person at the New Goshen UMC Fellowship Hall every Saturday morning for six weeks and would last for ninety minutes. Each participant contacted approved of the time, day, location, material, and length of sessions and voluntarily agreed to participate in the research project as a focus group participant. Additionally, it was crystalized that their information would be used in ways other than by the academy and would be linked

with a pre-survey, questionnaire, journal questions, and post-survey. This coinciding information will be assessed with the intent of all information being executed at New Goshen UMC. The intentionality of the focus group sessions was to be efficacious and continue to live on the other side of the six-week training sessions at New Goshen UMC.

Alternatively, a pointed discussion around the post-COVID-19 pandemic movement was emphasized. The discussion acknowledged that a shift in the behaviors and beliefs of youth prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was already taking place in the church, culture, and corporate world. As a result of the discussion, participants shared that they had witnessed a shift in the behaviors and beliefs of youth in spaces other than New Goshen UMC, such as in the corporate workplace. Discussion continued around the changes some participants experienced in corporate spaces, where changes and adjustments were made in areas of organizational leadership and human resource management to address the generational differences in behaviors and beliefs.

Subsequently, after acknowledging that group members had experienced behavioral and belief shifts in the youth that they interacted with in spaces outside of New Goshen UMC and had personally adjusted their behaviors to embrace Generation Z, they were questioned on how this same approach would be transmitted to New Goshen UMC as its leaders seek to disciple the youth of Generation Z. Focus Group Session One concluded with explaining the nature of journaling. Lastly, the participants shared their thoughts about youth discipleship, change, flexibility, generational core values, and the primacy of scripture.

Focus Group Session Two opened with prayer and a blessing of the light breakfast provided, then segued into a review of Proverbs 22:6 for the participants who

may not have embodied the interpretation made on its connection with the responsibility leaders had regarding youth discipleship found in scripture and the responsibility that leaders of the church currently have regarding youth discipleship. This review and examination of Proverbs 22:6 was integrated with questions on how the participants have already begun embracing and engaging youth thirteen to eighteen years old in an affirming manner in their personal and social lives apart from the church setting. This led to an in-depth discussion on the learning curve and obstacles presently faced by the participants when interacting with Generation Z youth outside of the church setting. The group requested that I share my interactions with Generation Z with them. This discussion tied in well with the E3 Playbook lesson on discipleship, as the group learned that discipleship centers around relationship building and is an ongoing process of spiritual development and not simply Bible study.

I provided the focus group with insight on discipleship as it related to the youth at New Goshen UMC. The discussion was centered around how the youth at New Goshen UMC and youth, in general, did not appear to be interested in God or their spiritual development. There was a guided discussion regarding the increase of youth from thirteen to eighteen years old who do not identify as Christian. This led to a spirited discussion of their thoughts on this cultural and generational shift compared to previous generations. Additionally, I discussed other Old Testament and New Testament narratives that emphasized youth discipleship. The discussion began with Psalm chapter seventy-eight, how the psalmist commanded the elders to teach the children and generations beyond so they would be knowledgeable of God's mighty acts, his power, and all the great things God had done on Israel’s behalf in order that the youth be obedient to God’s

law and learn to place their trust in God alone. Lastly, we looked at an image of youth discipleship as the Apostle Paul came to Lystra, where the young Timothy resided and took Timothy by his side, teaching him as they shared the gospel as they traveled throughout Asia Minor. We summed up what this discipleship process looked like for Paul and how Timothy responded to the discipleship he received. In conclusion, the focus group provided their reflections on their time shared together and group discussion, along with being provided a journal question to take home and complete.

Focus Group Session Three began with evaluating the applicability of the E3 discipleship strategy to the distinctive characteristics and mannerisms of Generation Z for youth discipleship. The E3 discipleship strategy focuses on the discipleship process between the coach and the athlete; however, its primary emphasis is on the older, more experienced leader providing discipleship to the younger, less experienced player. Therefore, we will use the coach and athlete as a metaphor to represent the older, more experienced leaders in the church and the less experienced youth in the church and community. I informed the focus group participants that the discipleship strategy was three-pronged, consisting of the leader and youth both engaging in the good news of the gospel, both being equipped with the Word of God, and lastly, empowering both the leader and the youth to live out the Great Commission found in Matthew chapter twenty-eight for preserved posterity. Concluding the discussion on the E3 Playbook discipleship strategy with how the three prongs incorporated their own three prongs: scripture, definition, and discipleship principles.

As the discussion shifted, I examined Generation Z's worldview and characteristics and their relevance to youth discipleship in the twenty-first century.

Following the analysis of Generation Z's worldview and characteristics and assessing the relevance of Generation Z's worldview and characteristics to theology, I put forward questions to the focus group participants relating to developing and shaping a theology of discipleship with Generation Z. This discussion dovetailed into the importance of being cognizant of the core values and traits that characterize Generation Z as a group when framing conversation to illuminate the nature and character of God through the discipleship process. With a sensibility toward New Goshen UMC desiring to make disciples of all nations, which includes the youth, as commanded in Matthew chapter twenty-eight, I reiterated how a theology of discipleship would be the current moving the youth discipleship process in the direction of spiritual development and growth. In concluding the focus group session, the participants reflected on the group discussion and were provided a journal question to take home and complete.

Focus Group Session Four got underway by returning the focus group's attention to the E3 Playbook. I shared that the E3 Playbook for discipleship was focused on three pillars: engage, equip, and empower. I began the discussion with the first of the E3 Playbook foundational pillars: engage. The theme of engagement was broken down into four focal points: engage God first, engage the heart, engage with the gospel, and engage to multiply. The guided discussion emphasized that to engage is to be relational. Engagement must be organic and authentic to be effective. Engagement with youth can and should take place in different types of settings and not merely in the church setting. I stressed the idea that engaging with youth beyond the church setting meets the youth where they are on their spiritual journey which builds trust through the sharing of life and scripture together.

This segment of the discussion focused on how the Apostle Paul, Silas, and Timothy engaged with the residents of Thessalonica during their visit by doing life together. Paul, Silas, and Timothy ultimately established a genuine relationship with the people, as Paul affirmed that the Thessalonians became precious to them and that they were able to share the gospel with them as well. The focus group began to describe various ways that they could engage with youth at New Goshen UMC beyond the church setting to develop relationships and promote a sincere sense of caring to open the door to share the gospel with them.

The discussion pivoted to how the focus group must first engage God before they could engage the youth. The focus group reflected on how, being separated from God, we do not have the power to engage youth. Thus, the first and preeminent step in discipling youth between thirteen and eighteen is to engage God. Likewise, Jesus demonstrated and taught his disciples this same spiritual principle of seeking God first before engaging with others. Jesus commanded them to look to God and the things of God first, and then God would provide all things needed for them. The focus group was able to concur that engaging God first through prayer was the recognition that if the youth at New Goshen UMC were to experience spiritual transformation through the discipleship process, it would originate from God.

Once the participants related youth discipleship to engagement with God, there was a flow into discussing engaging the heart, the gospel, and engaging to reproduce. The discussion centered on what scripture declares regarding the heart and how to ask guided questions to invite youth to share their deepest concerns and what is culturally relevant to them and their generation. Also included in this discussion was the power of storytelling,

as stories can inspire the heart. I was clear with the focus group that engaging youth's hearts is preparation to engage their heart with the gospel. I expressed that God moves through each of us to fulfill his plans. Engaging with the gospel with our youth is critical because it is through their response to the gospel that they will accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Philip models engaging the gospel as he shares the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. We see how the gospel is engaged and shared from one person to another. It is imperative that youth hear scripture so their faith in Jesus will increase.

To that end, the domains of engagement must intentionally reproduce the discipleship process. This section of the discussion focused on how to engage New Goshen UMC youth in the learning process through Bible study, community outreach, sharing the gospel, participation in worship, leadership opportunities, and social gatherings through collaboration with their peers.

Youth between thirteen and eighteen are digital natives and, through virtual platforms, have a large sphere of influence. Through virtual and in-person platforms, youth are provided with learning opportunities that allow them to participate in group study and group discussion of scripture and life. Through constructivist learning practices, the students are receiving and learning in a format that is not the teacher lecturing the student model. The youth learn from each other, while the youth leader facilitates this process by providing guided questions and prompts to generate curiosity and creativity among the youth. This constructive learning model allows the youth to also respond to their peers, hence creating robust engagement among the youth group.

This type of engagement is both guided and improvisational in nature as it requires the youth to respond to the guided question but also requires them to problem solve or respond to what other youth contribute without having prior knowledge. This constructivist engagement model resonates with Generation Z's primary characteristics: agency, collaboration, and problem-solving. This style of learning allows youth leaders to impact the youth and their circle of friends just as Jesus did as he engaged Zacchaeus and his circle of friends. In conclusion, the focus group provided their reflections on their time shared together and group discussion, along with being provided a journal question to take home and complete.

Focus Group Session Five began with a discussion centered on the second of the E3 Playbook foundational pillars: equip. The theme of equipping was broken down into four focal points: equip with prayer, equip with scripture, equip in community, and equip with a clear plan. Once a relationship between the youth leader and the youth has been developed and Jesus has been accepted as Lord and Savior, to grow in the love and grace of Christ and support their peers in knowing and growing in the love of Christ requires the youth to be equipped with the Word of God. The Apostle Paul is clear in Ephesians 4:12 that disciples are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ. During the discussion, the group formed a consensus that prayer should be a part of youth discipleship, including the equipping process. The group also reached a consensus that youth discipleship is not linear, nor is it a one-and-done event. Rather, youth discipleship is an ongoing process that can start, stop, and restart.

I transitioned the discussion to the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to equipping. Since the in-dwelling power of the Holy Spirit does the engaging and

equipping and is the One who will see the work of God through until completion, I raised the question for consideration: what role do social media and digital technology play in youth discipleship? Discussions emerged regarding the benefits of using social media platforms and digital technology if the Holy Spirit was at work. Participants also discussed their level of exposure and comfort with using social media platforms and their safety. Inquiries were initially made to allow the group to open up about how the group currently uses social media platforms and digital technology in their workspaces, school, and personal lives. This series of questions did not end with their viewpoint focusing on their personal and work lives; to the contrary, they were crafted to go from a wider lens and filter down through the smaller lens of the Church and then to New Goshen UMC. This was to help New Goshen UMC perceive how they could transfer the use of social media and digital technology that they were using in personal and workspaces to youth discipleship within the local congregation of New Goshen UMC. The discussion transitioned to New Goshen UMC. I asked the question: how do they perceive the use of social media and digital technology incorporated in youth discipleship at New Goshen UMC? I followed up with the question: how are social media and digital technology currently being used at New Goshen UMC, and what are their perspective on how the church is currently using social media and digital technology to do ministry and worship? I emphasized that the Holy Spirit is still transforming the youth in the discipleship process; however, social media and digital technology are tools that leaders can use to facilitate the process of discipleship. Stressing the fact that Generation Z is digital natives and just as the Holy Spirit works through the use of technology in previous generations and throughout the history of the Church, so can and will the Holy Spirit work through

the digital technology that this demographic of youth is using today to aid in youth discipleship.

In closing the meeting, I rejoined the discussion by stating that social media and the Holy Spirit are not mutually exclusive. I alluded to how social media does not prohibit the power of the Holy Spirit from being effective in the youth's spiritual development. The focus group session ended by allowing the group to reflect on their time together and the group discussion. I then provided the group with a journal question to take home and complete.

Focus Group Session Six concluded the six-week focus group training sessions at New Goshen UMC. The focus group session began by highlighting Proverbs 22:6. As the group revisited this verse, the discussion addressed the idea that youth discipleship is a continuous circle. The relevance of Proverbs 22:6 for this discussion is found in the b clause of Proverbs 22:6. Proverbs 22:6b paints a picture of the continuous cycle that youth discipleship should produce. Youth discipleship is designed so that as the youth grow in their stature and faith, they will not turn from the process of discipleship.

This idea of youth discipleship being a continuous circle was joined with the overarching discussion of how youth continue the continuous cycle of discipleship and not turn away. The larger discussion shifted to the third of the E3 Playbook foundational pillars: empower. The theme of empowerment was broken down into four focal points: empower by modeling, empower by assisting, empower by watching, and empower by launching. Discussions on how Jesus empowered his disciples by modeling as they observed how he lived his life and ministry. Paul admonished modeling as well when he encouraged the young followers in his first letter to Corinth to imitate him as he imitated

Christ. Paul was empowering them to use what they had seen him do and go out and make other disciples.

Empowerment comes by sharing responsibilities with others, as Jesus did when he gave his disciples the responsibility of feeding the crowd in Mark chapter six. Jesus empowered them with the challenge to feed the crowd and provided his disciples with support. Youth are empowered when they are given the opportunity to participate in and lead ministry, not simply when they are being ministered to. The focus group was asked how they foresee empowering the youth at New Goshen UMC.

Empowering youth comes by allowing the youth to watch the youth leader or mentor minister, and then the youth begin to do the work. This is illustrated in 2 Timothy chapter two as Paul talks about carrying the baton and then passing the baton to Timothy so Timothy can, in turn, pass the baton on to another young person, and on and on. I expressed to New Goshen UMC that once the baton is passed to their youth, they cannot sit down but must remain visible to encourage them onward. It is critical that the leadership at New Goshen UMC understand that they must empower their youth by decreasing the quantity that they are doing so they can increase their observation of what the youth are doing in ministry.

In wrapping up this discussion, The Great Commission given by Jesus to his disciples was considered to illustrate how New Goshen UMC must launch their youth out into the community after being taught so they can carry out the mission not only of The United Methodist Church and New Goshen UMC but the mission of the Kingdom by making more disciples.

Upon request, I provided the focus group with a few of the books and authors that I used to conduct this research project. The focus group wanted to access these resources for future reference. The focus group asked pertinent questions pertaining to Generation Z, social media and digital technology, youth discipleship, and the three pillars of the E3 Playbook. Each focus group participant was encouraged to share a summary of their personal experience regarding the six focus group training sessions and the need for youth discipleship training. The focus group was provided time for a question-and-answer session on the next steps New Goshen UMC plans to take concerning a youth discipleship ministry targeting youth between thirteen and eighteen years old.

I concluded the final focus group session by collecting the participants' journals and giving them a post-survey to complete. The post-survey measured the participants' understanding of the material presented and their perspective on how they interpreted it. Lastly, it was used to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the focus group training sessions. This was the conclusion of the focus group sessions.

Summary of Learning

The raw information to proceed is the sum function of the data collection during the six-week focus group training sessions at New Goshen UMC. This data was collected using pre-survey, post-survey, journaling, and questionnaire instruments. The total response output is equal to the number of participants in the focus group. There were not no answer options provided. Group participants were requested to provide their responses voluntarily. Although no answer options were available to select, the group participants were informed that they could, for whatever reason, choose not to participate in any

portion or all the instruments administered for data collection. Shared characteristics of the responses to the provided questions categorized the group participants' responses.

Focus Group Session One Pre-Survey Responses

How often do you interact with Generation Z on a monthly basis?

One out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z five or more times per month. One out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z zero times per month. Two out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z one to two times per month. Two out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z three to four times per month.

Virtual and digital ministries can potentially impact more individuals than in-person ministries.

Two out of six participants strongly agreed that virtual and digital ministries could potentially impact more individuals than in-person ministries. One out of six participants disagreed, and three out of six participants agreed.

Discipleship is the church's most essential mission.

Three out of six participants agreed that discipleship is the church's most essential mission. Three out of six participants strongly agreed that discipleship is the church's most essential mission.

This generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their life.

One out of six participants strongly agreed that this generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their lives. One out of six participants disagreed that this generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their lives. Four out of six participants agreed that this generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their lives.

This generation of youth spends too much time on social media.

One out of six participants strongly agreed that this generation of youth spends too much time on social media. One out of six participants disagreed. Two out of six participants disagreed. Two out of six participants agreed that this generation of youth spends too much time on social media.

Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences.

Two out six participants strongly agreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences. One out of six participants strongly disagreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences. Two out of six participants agreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences. One out of six participants disagreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences.

Focus Group Session Two Journal Responses

Describe a time when God used you to affirm a youth between thirteen and eighteen years old. How did you feel?

One out of six participants did not respond to the journal question. Five out of six participants responded that they have been able to initiate as an adult an affirming relational connection with youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen that invoked a sense of spiritual fulfillment.

Focus Group Session Three Journal Responses

What are some of the obstacles that would prevent you from having candid and culturally relevant discussions with teens?

Two out of six of the participants did not respond to the journal question. Two out of six participants responded that fear would prevent them from having candid and culturally relevant discussions with teens. Two out of six participants responded that a lack of preparation would prevent them from having candid and culturally relevant discussions with teens.

Have you evolved over time?

Two of the six participants did not respond to the journal question. Four out of six participants responded that their thoughts have evolved regarding having candid and culturally relevant discussions with teens.

Focus Group Session Four Journal Responses

In what ways would youth between thirteen and eighteen years old serving in leadership in the local church reflect the character of God?

One of the six participants did not respond to the journal question. Three of the six participants responded that youth serving in leadership in the local church reflects God's character trait of inclusiveness. Two of the six participants responded that youth serving in leadership in the local church reflects God's character trait of innovation.

Focus Group Session Five Journal Responses

How would you walk alongside a youth in your congregation in discipleship who was wrestling with understanding God considering the outcome of the US Presidential election?

One of the six participants did not respond to the journal question. Two of the six participants responded they would walk alongside this youth by discussing God's sovereignty. One of the six participants responded they would walk alongside this youth by creating a safe and affirming space. Two of the six participants said they would walk alongside this youth by discussing God has plan for their life. There was no Focus Group Session One or Focus Group Session Six journal questions provided.

Focus Group Session Three Questionnaire Responses

How do you define discipleship?

Two of the six participants responded that discipleship is learning about God. Three of the six participants responded that discipleship is mentoring another person. One of the six participants responded that discipleship is helping another become more like Jesus.

How do you define digital natives?

Three of the six participants responded that a digital native is a person who uses technology. Two of the six participants responded that a digital native is a person who is addicted to technology. One of the six participants responded that a digital native is a person born into a technology world.

What is the worldview of Gen Z? (i.e., truth, God, institutionalized religion, faith, spirituality, humanity)

Two of the six participants responded that Generation does not believe in God. Three of the six participants responded that Generation Z is privileged. One of the six participants responded that Generation Z are leaders.

What is the relevance of connectivity and constructivism as they relate to how Gen Z learns new information?

Three of the six participants responded that connectivity and constructivism are ways Gen Z uses technology to learn from each other. Three out of six participants also responded that connectivity and constructivism are ways to disciple youth.

Why is there a high church dropout rate among young adults?

Three of the six participants responded that there is a high dropout rate among young adults because they are not interested in church in this generation. One out of six participants responded that church people turned them off. One out of six participants responded that they had experienced church hurt. One out of six participants responded that they had not been taught as previous generations about God.

How do you understand the role of the church in discipleship?

Six of the six participants responded that the church's role is to make disciples.

What is your attitude toward digital discipleship?

Two of the six participants responded that digital discipleship is a great way to reach the youth. Two out of six participants responded that digital discipleship is unsafe and that they lack trust in it. Two out of six participants responded that the church needs training on how to use technology to disciple youth and adults.

Why is discipleship a lifelong process?

Six of the six participants responded that discipleship is a lifelong process because a person is spiritually growing for the entirety of their life.

Focus Group Six Post-Survey Responses

How often do you interact with Generation Z on a monthly basis?

Two of the six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z once or twice monthly. Two out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z five or more times per month. Two out of six participants responded that they interact with Generation Z three to four times per month. Virtual and digital ministries can potentially impact more individuals than in-person ministries. Six of the six participants strongly agreed that virtual and digital ministries could potentially impact more individuals than in-person ministries.

Discipleship is the church's most essential mission.

Four of the six participants strongly agreed that discipleship is the church's most essential mission. Two of the six participants agreed that discipleship is the church's most essential mission.

This generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their life.

Two of the six participants strongly agreed that this generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their lives. Four of the six participants agreed that this generation of youth is interested in God's plan for their lives.

This generation of youth spends too much time on social media.

Three of the six participants agreed that this generation of youth spends too much time on social media. Two of the six participants strongly disagreed that this generation of youth spends too much time on social media. One of the six participants disagreed that this generation of youth spends too much time on social media.

Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences.

Two of the six participants strongly agreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences. Four of the six participants agreed that Generation Z engages in critical, theological thinking regarding their lived experiences.

Conclusion

After collecting and analyzing the data provided by the focus group, I compared the data sets of pre-survey, post-survey, questionnaire, and journal responses to determine if there was the existence of cross intersection. By triangulating the data, I was able to pinpoint where multiple data sets converged. The purpose of triangulating the data was to enhance the validity of this research as well as look for limitations in the research design.

The findings of the cross intersection among all the data sets pointed to an increase in the participants' knowledge and tools relevant to youth discipleship. This alignment between the various data sets is critical to the research as it supports the same conclusion. Therefore, it can be concluded that this research is an overall success with some subtle distinctions to take notice of.

The identified sectors of strength for the execution of the focus group lie in its interactive discussion format. The chief aim was to ensure that each participant felt comfortable and safe, sharing their perceptions and perspectives within the group setting. The participant's comfort level was critical as it was needed to ensure that honest responses would be provided to generate the necessary data from this focus group. The next area of strength focused on the arrangement of the table and chairs, which promoted a sense of community rather than the feel of a presenter at a conference. This environmental consideration produced a level of closeness and trust among the focus group. This focus group demonstrated a high regard for the subject of engaging youth in discipleship ministry at New Goshen UMC.

The communication of material was intentionally void of theological and technical language that would have been difficult for the focus group to understand. The focus group's verbal responses and non-verbal body language throughout the sessions signaled an appreciation for not turning the focus group into an advanced seminary course. However, any terminology used that was unfamiliar to the focus group was thoroughly explained. The quantity of information and the depth of the information made for optimal learning by the focus group. The focus group was highly engaged and eager to return for subsequent focus group sessions.

Grounding the youth discipleship training in scripture as the foundation for building all the pillars of training was advantageous in seeking the consensus of New Goshen UMC's leadership to develop and implement a youth discipleship ministry targeting youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. This was important for the simple reason that New Goshen UMC is a congregation that believes that serving God is ordering the church according to biblical scripture. Without being grounded in scripture, many of the focus group participants may not have been interested in participating in this focus group.

The method employed to generate sufficient and optimal feedback for the participants to respond to the guided questions was a key factor for the group participants. The method provided an opportunity for the focus group to engage in an open exchange format to answer guided questions. This open exchange format did not debase the value of their responses; it spurred more detailed responses from the participants. In addition to being provided the opportunity for the focus group to engage in an open exchange format to respond to guided questions, the use of short and clear responses was to be provided. This short-answer approach seemed to be appreciated by the participants as it did not overwhelm them and was necessary to garner their insight for this research. Their short-answer responses were organized by keywords that highlighted topics, short phrases, and other similarities that described youth discipleship used by the participants.

According to the data gathered, this focus group of New Goshen UMC leaders was efficacious in providing insight into youth discipleship at New Goshen UMC. The focus group’s understanding of the biblical support for youth discipleship in society and

throughout the church's history was crucial. Equally important was the focus group's recognition of how youth discipleship ministry has been deeply ingrained in the church's history.

Moreover, the focus group participants enjoyed interacting with the youth at New Goshen UMC. It was noticeable to me that the focus group participants embraced the youth more as they began to grasp the youth's value to ministry at New Goshen UMC. There were some opportunities in worship for youth to participate in that some of the focus group members who had longer membership at the church were familiar with. Many of the focus group members expressed they would like to see youth involved in a greater capacity in ministry as in years past. The focus group participants did not feel compelled to code-switch in their language, clothing, or social events, though they were open to learning new concepts and views regarding Generation Z youth.

A point of tension, though not startled by it, was the desire of many of the focus group participants exerting unconscious muscle memory to lean into pulling Generation Z into their world and not fully honoring the uniqueness and authenticity of Generation Z to come into their world to understand who they are. Some of the participants referred to the good ole days of the church as if Generation Z does not represent the best of our present day. This nostalgia is a lack of exposure to Generation Z youth gifts and graces and a struggling point that the twentieth-century church will not return. It will be of the essence to create opportunities for this focus group to interact more with Generation Z to gain additional insight and trust between the two groups. I am optimistic about future opportunities for engagement between Generation Z youth and this focus group participants.

It was refreshing to witness these focus group participants embrace youth discipleship and desire to implement a youth discipleship ministry at New Goshen UMC. However, this focus group initially expressed that they would not attempt to implement a youth discipleship ministry until they were equipped with knowledge of this generation's youth. Understanding that equipping the focus group participants to disciple youth was of the utmost importance, it was not the sole goal of youth discipleship training. A goal that was desired was to train these leaders so that they could train other leaders at New Goshen UMC. Having a great level of comfort and confidence in the information they learned during the focus group sessions, all the focus group participants agreed to share what they had learned with others at New Goshen UMC. The focus group participants have been engaged, equipped, and empowered to the degree of encouraging other members to participate in youth discipleship training. In no way does this express that New Goshen UMC is ready to place the leadership of the church completely in the hands of the youth, but it is obvious that they are willing to share power and voice with the youth.

It became clear that how the survey questions were phrased was just as important as allowing a style of answering to avoid overwhelming them. I would alter how I phrased the questions to increase participant engagement when I facilitated in the future. It was critical that the articulation of the language was concise and precise for the participant’s understanding. This would have been helpful as simplicity would have avoided the need to clarify or define, which minimized the training experience. I will certainly make this a top priority in future opportunities to train at New Goshen UMC.

Lastly, I would have increased the duration of the focus group sessions from six weeks to eight weeks. The ninety-minute training sessions seem to accommodate the group participants well. Although all the material was covered, having two additional training sessions would have allowed for more depth to the training session. Also, two additional training sessions would have provided more repletion for the focus group participants to simulate youth discipleship ministry strategies and key objectives. Participants constantly alluded to the time frame of our time together, therefore forcing the pace of the training sessions. This is an aspect of the training design that I would change if presented with future opportunities.

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